NF

ISSUE #58: APOCALYPSE WOW!

POKÉMON LEGENDS: **ARCEUS**

MLB THE SHOW 22

SPLATOON 3

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3

13 SENTINELS: AEGIS RIM

MINA THE HOLLOWER

DRAGON QUEST XII: THE FLAMES OF FATE

DEATH'S DOOR

CHICORY: A COLORFUL TALE

INTERVIEW: **MATT KAP**

CASTLEVANIA: SEAL OF THE ECLIPSE

CHARACTER PROFILE: **BANDANA WADDLE DEE**

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY: BRAIN VS. BRAIN

MARCH/ APRIL 2022

THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR KIT & KRYSTA

IN OUR LAST issue, we reported the sad news that time had run out for Nintendo Minute. The long-running YouTube variety show hosted by long-time Nintendo employees Kit Ellis and Krysta Yang had been active since 2013 and had broadcast over 420 different episodes, but the Big N decided it was time for it to end, and Kit and Krysta said their goodbyes in a final episode this past December.

Happily, that ending has led to a new beginning! Kit and Krysta have now stepped away from Nintendo entirely and struck out on their own, launching a brand-new podcast simply named The Kit & Krysta Podcast. They've launched a full array of social media pages, from a dedicated YouTube channel to host video versions of their new episodes to a Twitter account to provide updates on what's coming up next to, most importantly, a Patreon page where fans can pitch in a few bucks a month to help crowdfund the podcast's continued existence for years to come.

Having Kit and Krysta now on the outside of Nintendo is fascinating, as they're able to offer deep insight into the goings-on in the industry without having to fully check themselves and make sure everything they say is approved by the Big N brass. I'm already intrigued, and if you give them a listen, I think you will be too! **— LUCAS**

Patreon.com/KitAndKrysta

P.S. Kit was one of the first Nintendo Force supporters, so let's repay the favor and support this all-new show!

ISSUE #58: APOCALYPSE WOW!

CONTENTS

INBOX
4

NEWS
8

DOWNLOAD
14

COMICS
7, 32, 41, 64, 68, 81

FEATURES
33

PREVIEWS
42

RETRO
57

INTERVIEW
65

REVIEWS
69

COMMUNITY
78

NEXT ISSUE
82

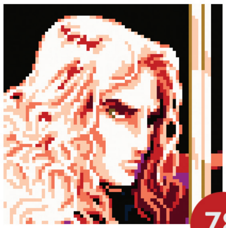
MARCH/ APRIL 2022

54

56

53

42


78

33

16

52

55

30

70

48

65

18

49

76

ON THE COVER

Kirby has reclaimed the cover position of our fine publication, but unlike his previous few appearances in that spotlight, it's not a wacky series spin-off he's headlining this time! Rather, Kirby and the Forgotten Land is the Pink Powerhouse's newest mainline quest – and potentially the first of many journeys he'll take in full 3D! (It only took him 30 years to find the third dimension!) But which will stand out more in the adventure: Kirby himself, or the bleak settings he'll explore?

60

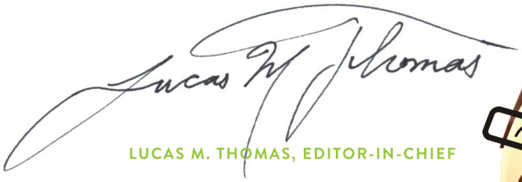
INBOX

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

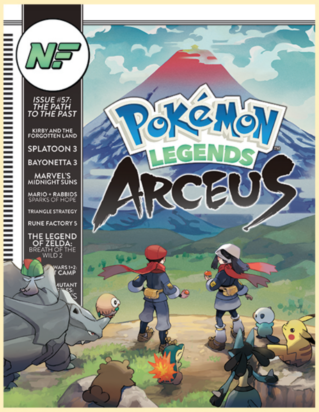
In a world that bombards us daily with fresh news of wars, diseases and disastrous climate change, you'd think that most people would seek a reprieve with the entertainment they consume – you'd think they would want to take their minds off such ever-present problems. But no! More and more, the television shows, movies and video games we're offered take those same kinds of disasters and amplify them to an even greater intensity. They present worlds in which normal human life has been all but eradicated – worlds afflicted by some kind of apocalypse. And the protagonists of those tales are almost always the ones left trying to pick up the pieces and get back to some kind of new "normal" for whoever's left.

We're looking into this topic further in this edition of Nintendo Force, as the "post-apocalyptic setting" trope is being placed front-and-center in a surprising series: Kirby! The happy-go-lucky hero will soon find himself exploring the abandoned civilization of the Forgotten Land. What happened there? Why did such a seemingly bustling society crumble into nothing, leaving their buildings behind to succumb to rust and the slow creep of overgrown vegetation? And will Kirby be able to help bring that Land back from the brink?

Our titular feature, Apocalypse Wow!, will present other end-of-the-world scenarios that have played out in past games, our Previews section will host a couple of other approaching apocalypses through games like Splatoon 3 and 13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim, and in Reviews we'll lead off with Pokémon Legends: Arceus, which *(small spoiler)* also deals with world-ending doom! Here's hoping you're entertained by all this conversation about cataclysms!



LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



ISSUE #57: JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2022

What a huge kickoff to 2022! Usually the January/February time period is a little light on major new releases, but this time Pokémon Legends: Arceus arrived with authority and became the biggest January launch in Nintendo history! Maybe you're one of the millions already playing it, but if not we've got our full review later in this issue to give you further insight into its adventure!

Next on the horizon is Kirby, so our Player's Poll questions circled around that circular hero last time. We asked if you typically enjoy 3D games or 2D ones (since he's setting out on his first real 3D quest in the Forgotten Land). Then we wondered what new power/hat you'd gift to Kirby if you could. And finally, we sought your thoughts on games that use post-apocalyptic settings. Here's what just a few of you wrote in to say in response:

LETTERS

I think I prefer simpler in this case, so 2D over 3D. In 2D every little thing is more noticeable. In a 3D game if you see something like a rock or mushrooms you might not think anything of it, but in 2D you can notice everything in the environment on one screen, without having to move the camera around. I could go on but for me it's all about 2D.

I think that the problem with all the apocalyptic media going around is that it all feels too samey. There are countless zombie or nuclear war apocalypses in movies and games. If you can find an interesting or unique apocalypse however, it can be immensely satisfying.

Example: Dr. Stone. It tells the story of what would happen if every human on Earth got turned to stone. Then 3,000 years later a few people break free of their stone casings and find themselves in a wild world. I found that premise to be extremely interesting. I don't think the new Kirby game could pull off something like that, but that's not what Kirby games are about. (At least as far as I know, I haven't played the 3DS games.) Anyway, as long as the gameplay is fun and the enemies are cute, I'm in. **— DOMINICO N.**

I've been thinking about the possibilities for Kirby's Copy Abilities and their respective hats since I first started playing his games! If I had to pick just one, I'd probably go with an ability where Kirby's shadow can literally suck enemies into a black abyss never to return. This ability's hat would be a kitsune mask worn on the side, like at a festival. I once herd kitsune are able to trap people in their own shadows – 15 years later I don't think that was in actual kitsune lore, but it's something I thought up for this! **— TEENKITSUNE**

If I could give Kirby one more power, it would be to warp between different time periods. **— STARINGSKI3S**

I like games that are mostly 3D, but still have small parts that are 2D. Like Super Mario Odyssey.

If I where to give Kirby a power, I think it would be to spit paint at his enemies and we would be in Splatoon 3! **— ALEX H.**

I think 3D games tend to have a better reputation than 2D games, and for good reason: The addition of the third dimension just allows for so many more capabilities and world/level building than being restricted to a single plane of movement – like open-world exploration, for one. But as the very company this magazine is all about has proved time and time again, that doesn't mean you can't work some serious magic with only two dimensions if you put your mind to it. Some of the greatest games of all time are simple 2D platformers, from beloved Nintendo classics like Super Mario Bros. 3 and Super Metroid to expertly crafted modern indie titles like Shovel Knight, Hollow Knight, Celeste and many, many more from both categories. 2D games carry their own simple but special charm, and they have just as much of a place in the ever-expanding gaming world as 3D ones.

ROBO KIRBY?

I would give Kirby a Robot power! Different than the mech ability in Planet Robobot, he would actually turn into a robot, and can summon up to four mech friends! **— DASH BROOKS**

Good call! Planet Robobot was one of Kirby's best adventures — certainly a contender for strongest ever when it comes to theme, as Kirby worked to avert a robo-pocalypse threatening to transform Planet Popstar into a fully mechanized and unnatural world. Our hero never transformed into a robot himself, but seeing him go cybernetic by choice to battle baddies would be great! (And summoning extra allies is always tons of fun.)

The list of powers and skills Kirby hasn't gotten his little pink stubs on yet is a short one indeed, but one type of ability I'm surprised he hasn't heavily played with yet is a classic Black Mage-type ability. I would give Kirby a Sorcerer ability that outfits him with a fancy robe, hood and magic wand or staff and allows him to cast a variety of elemental spells like a dark beam, a fireball, an AoE lightning blast and so on. I'd like to see an eldritch demon step up to *that!*

Lastly, the "post-apocalyptic" trope — I think it's become a little dime-a-dozen in media and it generally just doesn't match up with the genres of games I like to play . . . but this is Nintendo after all, and they have a knack for taking well-known ideas and mixing them up with crazy spins and curveballs to better suit them to their adolescent-including audience. So I'm looking forward to seeing the Kirby series' take on it.

As for your Pokémon, Carter, according to the Pokémon wiki Bulbapedia there's only one Grass/Ground-type, and that's Torterra! **— MATT W.**

I love 2D and 3D, so it's a case-by-case basis for me. I remember as a kid wishing so badly for a 3D Kirby game (and for all my favorite 2D franchises, really), so hearing about Kirby and the Forgotten Land was a really big moment for me! The culmination of a childhood wish!

If I could give Kirby a new power . . . quite a tall order considering how many he's had over the years. Not sure if this has been done before, but I'd love to see Kirby have some sort of "Master Hand" ability! He could shoot lasers, toss bombs and grab his foes for devastating throws! Master Hand has appeared in Kirby games before, so why not?

"Post-apocalyptic" can be overdone, but a lot of that seems to depend on tone. This game doesn't seem so much "post-apocalyptic" as it just seems, well . . . forgotten. Left to decay over time. It's got a sort of timeless/ageless feel that I really love. Like exploring ancient ruins! **— TOM M. (GAMETOM)**

I tend to enjoy both — 2D gaming is so simple and easy to play; on the other hand, 3D worlds offer up a level of freedom and immersion that is very difficult to pull off with two dimensions.

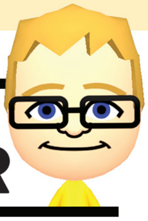
Kirby always has such interesting powers. The best ones are the kind you least expect. I'd definitely love to see a "Business" Copy Ability that allows Kirby to attack with a briefcase, office supplies and financial reports!

The Forgotten Land is certainly an interesting change of pace considering Kirby usually wanders around joyful and vibrant settings. Putting Kirby in a desolate environment will make for a strong visual contrast and he'll stand out more brightly as a result! **— ALBERTO V.**

I prefer 3D games when it comes to games like platformers, but a 2D game can be just as good. My favorite 3D platformer would have to be Super Mario Galaxy, due to the fun of exploring all the different galaxies, and by favorite 2D platformer would probably have to go to New Super Mario Bros. U, just because it's very simple, whilst still being exciting to play through. **— ZACHARY H.**

Most post-apocalyptic games only seem to focus on the follies and fragile survival of mankind. It's always a dreary view, and most people never stop to realize the hidden beauty of nature in them. I recently read an article on how Hyrule Warriors had trouble recreating BOTW's grass. In its comments, someone said, "The first thing a gamer destroys is the last thing they appreciate." That really struck a chord with me — the developers spend so much time creating a world that showcases nature's ability to survive anything and its slow reclamation, but most just hurriedly rush by it without noticing. I really like to just stop sometimes and see the creative ways old buildings and human objects have been repurposed by animals and nature. If anyone can put a happy spin on such a world, it'll be Kirby! **— BEN W.**

CARTER'S CORNER



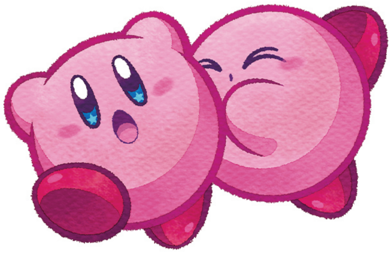
The answer to the quiz from our last issue is Torterra! (Matt W. got it right: There are no other Grass/Ground-types.) And for the Normal/Flying-type you probably guessed Staraptor is on my team, but it's Staravia instead! I like it better when it isn't evolved all the way. Turn to Page 77 to learn more about my adventure in Sinnoh!

In this Carter's Corner I'll tell you a bit about Pokémon Legends: Arceus. My Dad's already beat the game, but by the time you're reading this, I'll be close to that too.

The goal in Pokémon Legends: Arceus is to quell five Frenzied Pokémon, and then do what's left to do. The first one is Kleavor, a totally new Pokémon, but the rest are Hisuian forms of old monsters: Lilligant, Arcanine, Electrode and Avalugg. Avalugg is huge! Probably the size of Gigantamax Urshifu. And some Pokémon have red eyes. They're Alpha Pokémon, and they're bigger and stronger than normal ones.

Other than Kleavor, the new Pokémon seem to be Wyrdeer, Ursaluna (Ursaring's evolved form), Basculegion, Sneasler and Overqwil (which evolve from Hisuian forms of Sneasel and Qwilfish). We'll show a bunch of them in my Dad's review!

Now instead of a quiz, I've got a new counting challenge for you: How many Kirbys can you find in this issue? I'll tell you the total next time!



- EMILIA (@EBEANIA)

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Dash Brooks**, the winner of our Kirby Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some questions about the sporty side of gaming!

QUESTION #1

Are you a fan of sports video games? If so, when did you first start playing them? If not, would you ever consider giving the genre a try?

QUESTION #2

Mario has hosted a lot of sports series, from Tennis to Golf to Baseball and more. What sport should his crew play next?

QUESTION #3

Your thoughts on motion controls in sports games. Do you like actually moving your body to play, or would you prefer to just press buttons?

Send your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #59" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win the new Mario Strikers: Battle League for Nintendo Switch!

NINTENDO FORCE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas
@NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Evan Campbell
@evancampbell
Jonathan Holmes
@NonTrotski
Kevin Knezevic
@kevknez
Maggie Jones Lutey
@AvengerMags
Brett Martin
@NightramVGMM
David Oxford
@LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford
@nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce
@megaStryke
Kris Randazzo
@GeekadeKris
Rebecca Rudranath
@strawbecky_81

STAFF ARTISTS
John-Charles Holmes
@Sonic9jct
Lindsey Layne King
@LuminousLungKey
Matthew Loffhagen
@kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto
@MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson
@thormeister1971

CONTRIBUTORS
Dan Ryan
@geekadedan
Sackchief
@sackchief
Carter Thomas

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

NEWS

Industry Acquisitions are Accelerating

How will Microsoft's biggest buyout yet affect Nintendo's side of the video game business?

THE WEEKS LEADING up to this issue's release have been filled with some pretty significant acquisitions in the world of electronic gaming. The New York Times bought Wordle, the online sensation that's been sweeping the nation. Sony bought Destiny 2 developer/publisher Bungie, and no, much like when a Microsoft executive thought their purchase of Rare netted them Donkey Kong, the idea that Sony now owns Halo is patently untrue.

But speaking of Microsoft, it's with them that the most significant of all recent acquisitions took place, as they laid down $68,700,000,000 to acquire the behemoth known as Activision Blizzard, which also includes mobile game publisher King.

And they paid in cash.

When it closes by June of 2023, this transaction (pending approvals) will make Microsoft the third-largest video game publisher in the world by revenue, just behind Tencent and Sony. (Nintendo was third previously, followed by Microsoft and Activision Blizzard as separate entities, according to CNBC.) This will also put several of gaming's biggest franchises into the possession of Microsoft, including Call of Duty, Overwatch, World of Warcraft, Diablo, StarCraft and Candy Crush.

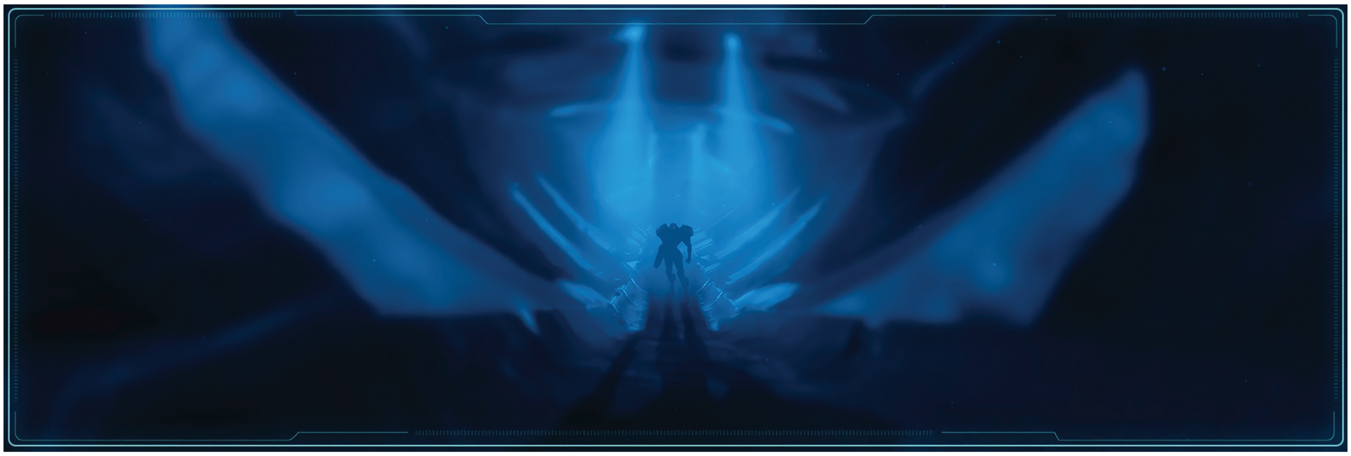
Before this acquisition, Activision Blizzard had been at the center of a storm of controversy for the last year, most (if not all) of the details of which are not fit for this publication. Suffice it to say, that no doubt helped facilitate the purchase in the first place, as all signs prior did not point to things getting better at the company.

It all starts at the top, and to that point, Chief Executive Officer Robert Kotick ("Bobby" to his enemies) is slated to stay on in his position for the time being (as is the nature of deals such as this). When the deal closes, Kotick will report to the Microsoft Gaming CEO, Phil Spencer – though The Wall Street Journal's sources have said that he's out the door when that happens. (The latter is a prospect that thrills many of those working there.)

In addition to Activision Blizzard's top cash cows, Spencer has expressed excitement about letting Activision developers work on more than just Call of Duty again, as well as accessing the treasure trove of other franchises the publisher has let lay dormant over the years. These include such notable intellectual properties as the legendary Pitfall, Crash Bandicoot, Spyro the Dragon, Guitar Hero, King's Quest and even HeXen (which Phil is particularly excited about).

As for how much would reach Nintendo platforms, that remains to be seen. While most titles that emerge from this deal may end up exclusive to Xbox and PC, Call of Duty is set to remain multiplatform for the time being – though that series hasn't graced a Nintendo platform since 2013's Call of Duty: Ghosts for Wii U. Still, Microsoft has been known to play nicely with Nintendo, most recently with the release of Banjo-Kazooie on Nintendo Switch Online, so there may be hope yet.

> "While big company acquisitions aren't my favorite thing in the world, in this case? It needed to happen. With the state of Activision, any hope for positive change was not going to come from within. The employees and their library all deserve better, and hopefully now they'll get that. Whether or not it was Microsoft, someone needed to do something before the whole thing fell in on itself."
> **– DAVID**



Is Nintendo Getting us Primed for a Reveal?

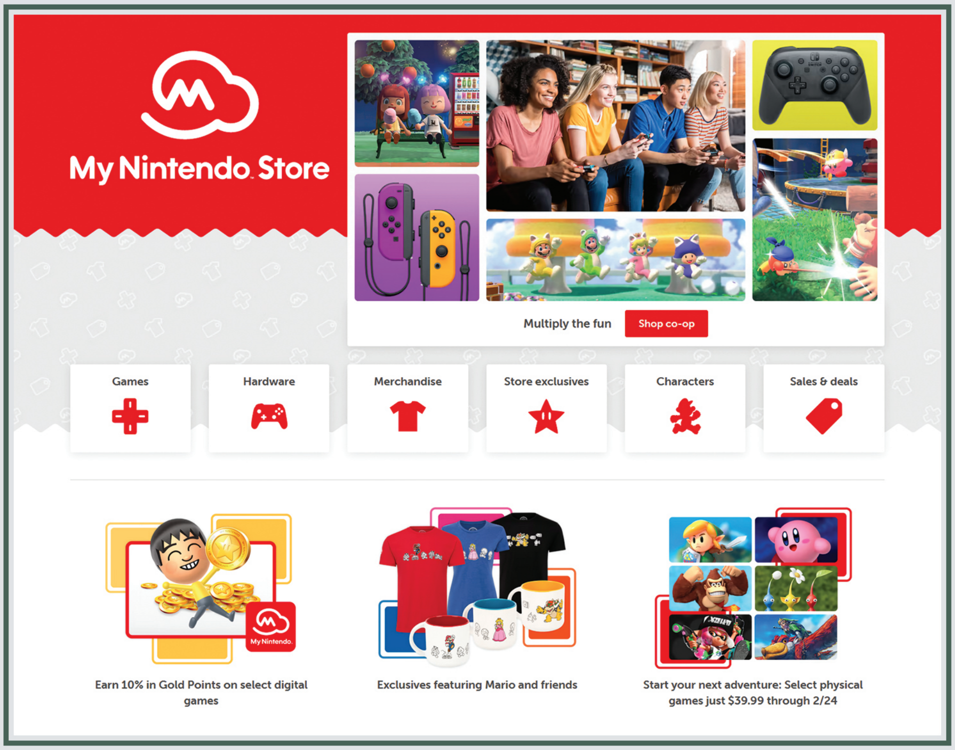
All it takes is the tiniest of teases to get Metroid Prime fans spinning with fresh speculation!

WE'RE GETTING CLOSE to the five-year anniversary of the announcement of Metroid Prime 4, which happened at E3 2017 in June of that year. We also just passed the three-year anniversary of Nintendo restarting development on the game with Retro Studios, after they were apparently unsatisfied with what the first developers who worked on the highly anticipated sequel had produced leading up to January 2019.

We should be getting close to finally seeing *something* from the game, right? Sure, the development restart could have very well set the sequel's progress all the way back to square one, and sure, we also have to factor in the pandemic-related delays that the entire video game industry has had to deal with since early 2020. But even with all that, shouldn't we maybe be getting close to a glimpse?

After so many years of getting just about zero news on the progress of the project, Metroid Prime fans are ready to take even the smallest hint of information and shout it from the mountaintops. So when Retro Studios recently updated their Twitter account with the new header art seen above, Samus supporters around the world began to go bonkers. It's *something!* It's an actual new piece of concept art!

Now, there's next to nothing to really glean from this image regarding Metroid Prime 4 – if it even is meant to be from Prime 4 and not just a generic piece of Samus Aran art – but that hasn't stopped starved fans from going over it with magnifying glasses regardless. Is this a visor view? Is that a ship behind her? Who knows – but hopefully this isn't all we get to see from Prime 4 this year! **– LUCAS**



Now Open!

It's the new My Nintendo Store!

WHO'S READY TO do a little shopping?

Nintendo has just updated their official website, and in doing so they've rebranded and relaunched their previously under-the-radar online storefront. Now known as the My Nintendo Store, it looks like this is one online shop that's ready to step out of the shadows and into the spotlight!

There appear to be a pair of key revisions compared to the old Nintendo.com store. First, the ability to order physical copies of games has been made a much more prominent option. Nintendo previously offered direct sales of a select few cartridges, but now they appear to be positioning themselves as a proper alternative to buying from the likes of Amazon. (Just not preorders?)

Second: store exclusives! Items that previously could only be purchased in person at the Nintendo NY brick-and-mortar store are now here as well. So maybe the days of New Yorkers getting exclusive access to fresh merch are over! We'll see if that holds true in the months ahead. **– LUCAS**

KIRBY'S TURNING 30!

Why not celebrate by giving yourself a little present?

I'M UNSURE WHETHER people realize the sheer amount of Kirby items that release nearly every month in Japan. We don't see much in North America or Europe, but in Japan Kirby gets more merch than Mario. Kirby registers his 30th trip around the sun this year, and each manufacturer with the license is going all out.

There are commemorative plushes, acrylic keychains, puzzles, badges, coins, mugs, cups, cushions, water bottles, food storage, stickers, figures, pouches, pennants, chopsticks and even masking tape. All branded with the celebration's moniker: "Pink Puffy Power." It's incredibly overwhelming from a collecting standpoint, and this is *apart* from the normal monthly deluge. There's also currently a campaign called Kirby's Comic Panic that has a slew of similar items listed above releasing to various shops.

And that's still only the things that have been announced! New items have been revealed weekly that seem to all share an April release, as April 27 marks the 30th anniversary of Kirby's Dream Land in Japan. The anniversary merch may all flood the market that month, or may release throughout the year. Regardless, 2022 could easily be the year with the most released merchandise for our favorite Pink Puffball.

OFFENSE OR DEFENSE?

Deflect like Link or fight like a squirrel!

FIRST 4 FIGURES keeps on rolling with new offerings, and next up are Bayonetta's Scarborough Fair replicas, a new Hylian Shield and a new Conker the Squirrel statue.

Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme all run about $430 to $450 each, but you can buy the whole set for a whopping $1,700. The exclusive editions available through F4F have LED light functions.

The Hylian Shield will set you back around $100. There have been several Hylian Shield replicas released both officially and unofficially over the years, and while the 12-inch scale is unique and the release under the Breath of the Wild name is new, it's not a piece that will turn many heads.

The regular and exclusive Soldier Conker statues feature Conker blasting away on a battlefield and cost $575 or $600, respectively. The $770 definitive edition features him atop corpses of the Tediz baddies he's waging war against. Early bird pricing saves a ton!

BY BRETT MARTIN

Buy Byleth

A fiery new Fire Emblem figure!

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS IS releasing this new, gorgeous statue that Good Smile Company will distribute. Stealing $250 of your hard-earned coins, this 1/7th scale statue features the female version of Byleth from Fire Emblem: Three Houses (and Smash, and Three Hopes!). Her Sword of the Creator has two versions that can be interchanged for display: There's the standard sword, and then there's the fire-chain-whip-of-doom sword that dynamically flails around her body. She's simultaneously wearing too many and too few clothes for combat, as her jacket is in the way of her sword technique and the "armor" on her legs has seen better days. The ground is literally rising as she struts.

In all seriousness though, this sculpt is great and I wish she looked like this in Smash. The statue is up for pre-order around the world. It will be released in North America in April . . . of 2023.

Sinnoh's Pokémon at Proper Scale

Size matters with the Pokémon Scale World line of collectible figurines!

WHILE INCREDIBLY EXPENSIVE, the Pokémon Scale World line has been a big success among collectors.

Bandai has announced a second set of figures from the Sinnoh region set to be released in June of 2022. Lucas and Dawn – both sporting their Platinum outfits – will release alongside nine new-to-the-line Pokémon: Starly, Bidoof, Luxray, Glaceon, Riolu, Lucario, Gible, Shinx and Leafeon. In August, the almighty Arceus will join them as a 1/20th scale figure and cost around $90. In July, Cynthia and Garchomp will arrive alongside a mess of other scaled Pocket Monsters. In fact, more than 30 figures have been released from the Sinnoh region this year alone, and Bandai Spirits shows no signs of slowing down! Most of them are still available to order or pre-order online if you're keeping up with this amazing and unique collection.

It's good to see that the Scale World product line will continue, though these figures' claim to fame is being accurately scaled to one another, and the new Pokémon Legends: Arceus has kind of messed that up with its introduction of varying sizes of all these species! (I guess only these figures' prices will be Alpha-sized.)

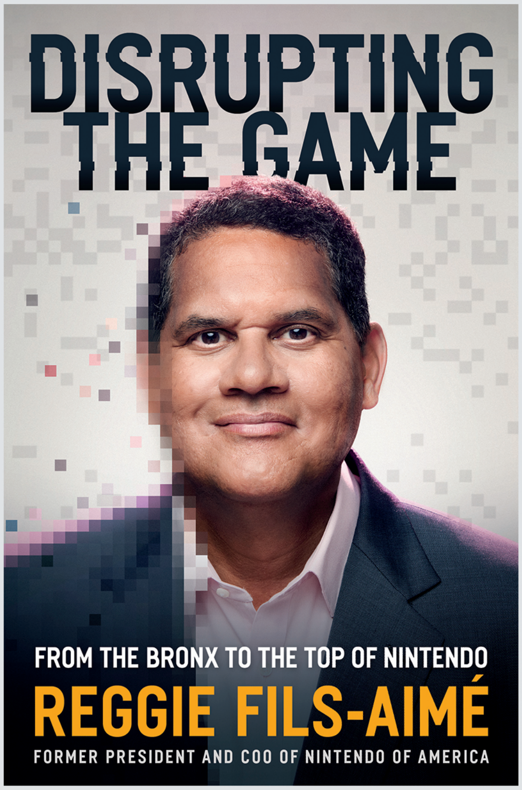
amiibo UPDATE

IT'S ALMOST SPRING of 2022 and we're still talking about amiibo. If that doesn't prove the lasting power of Nintendo characters, I don't know what does!

Min Min, Steve and Alex are still set for a Spring release date as I'm writing this. Still announced but without release dates are Sephiroth, Pyra & Mythra, Kazuya and Sora. As production takes a while, those could easily stretch throughout the remainder of this year.

It's also worth mentioning that Kirby and Meta Knight will be re-released, and they're also reprinting King Dedede from the Smash line to line up with the release of Kirby and the Forgotten Land. amiibo is still experiencing its toys-to-life roots!

Will we see more reprints for upcoming games like Breath of the Wild 2? Or could that one be a big enough event of a release that it would get a brand-new amiibo due to Link's new look?



Read About Reggie

In this autobiographical account of his career!

READY TO LEARN the secrets of the Regginator?

Disrupting the Game is the name of former Nintendo of America President and COO Reggie Fils-Aimé's new autobiography, and it's set to go on sale on May 3. Within its pages you'll find insider info and wisdom earned from his years at the top of the NOA foodchain, going all the way back to his iconic self-introduction at E3 2004.

And before! Reggie promises childhood tales too, as he'll paint a complete picture of how he elevated himself "from the Bronx to the top of Nintendo" one step at a time. It's sure to be a page-turner!

Even more compelling, though, will be the audio book version. Who wouldn't want to listen to Reggie talking right to them for nearly seven hours straight?

(Mother 3 fans, perhaps.) **– LUCAS**

Renovations Complete

Nintendo's original headquarters is now a hotel.

IT'S BEEN 133 years since Nintendo was first founded, establishing itself way back in 1889 as a playing card manufacturing company located in the heart of Kyoto, Japan. As the decades rolled on, Nintendo expanded their operations to include more and more different business ventures, but they remained in the same spot where they'd first started for 70 years – all the way until 1959! At that point they relocated their base of operations . . . but the building they abandoned remained, untouched, aging its way through six further decades with no other tenants taking up occupancy.

Now you can be the one to live there! (Temporarily, at least.)

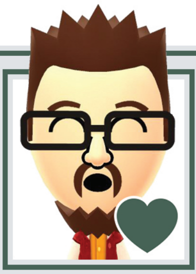
We reported a couple of years ago that a Tokyo-based hospitality company called Plan Do See had taken ownership of the property and had plans to renovate and add on to the existing building in order to create a new hotel. Well, those renovations are finally complete! After a delay of around nine months (since they'd at first hoped to open for guests in Summer 2021), the hotel, now named Marufukuro, has started accepting reservations and will host its first visitors on April 1.

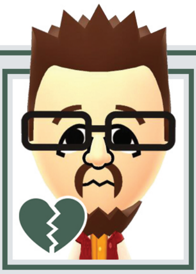
Be wary of breaking open your wallets quite yet, though, for a couple of reasons. First, international travel remains fraught with frustration amid the now two-years-long coronavirus pandemic, and Japan currently has its borders closed to all foreign travelers. Second, even if you could safely and easily catch a flight straight to Kyoto, you might not vibe with the style of the finished hotel. Yes, it's located at the same geographical location that Nintendo once occupied, but there's nothing Nintendo-ish or touristy about this place now. Don't expect galleries of games in the lobby or a Mario-shaped mint on your pillow.

Oh, and reservations are also super expensive! This is going to be a trip that only a handful of true Nintendo diehards are likely to ever make.

> "Nintendo was still a long way away from making video games by the time they moved in 1959, so I can understand this hotel not including anything video game-related. But you'd think they'd lean into Nintendo nostalgia at least a little bit! Maybe some hanafuda cards in the nightstand? – **LUCAS**"

Great!
I'd love to buy tickets to Japan to see the new hotel!





Oh.
I can only afford a copy of Reggie's book instead.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to come out in the next few months.

THE MONTH OF March will get started with a whole lot of troops being marched into battle, as the Square Enix strategy game Triangle Strategy begins its attack on players' wallets on March 4. If you'd like to try before you buy, there's a new demo downloadable for free in the eShop, and it allows you to play all the way through the first three story chapters, then transfer your progress to the full game! Review coming next time.

SQUARE ENIX SEEMS to have a bit more confidence in the sales potential of Triangle Strategy than their second March release, Chocobo GP, which is set for March 10. That's because, of the two, only Triangle Strategy is getting a physical release in North America! If you want this new racer on cart, though, you can import from Japan.

THE FIRST DAY of spring happens on March 20 this year – that's the Vernal Equinox if you want to sound fancy – and the release of Rune Factory 5 just two days later on March 22 feels like it's perfectly timed as a result! After all, what better time to get into a game about farming than when actual farmers are heading out into their fields to get their crops started for the year too? Look for our review in our next issue!

THIS MIGHTY MEATY month of March will round itself out with another smorgasbord of a video game adventure: this issue's cover star, Kirby and the Forgotten Land! March 25 is when you'll get to sink your teeth into this latest quest of Nintendo's insatiable inhaling hero. We've got a tasty final preview prepared for you starting on Page 42. Yum!

FOLLOWING THE COVER star of NF #58 will be the cover star of NF #56! Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp was originally planned to debut this past December, which is why our focus a couple of issues ago went to its world of war. But a last-minute delay bumped it back, and it hovered around in release date limbo for a few months before finally landing on a new date for deployment: April 8! Get ready to go to war!

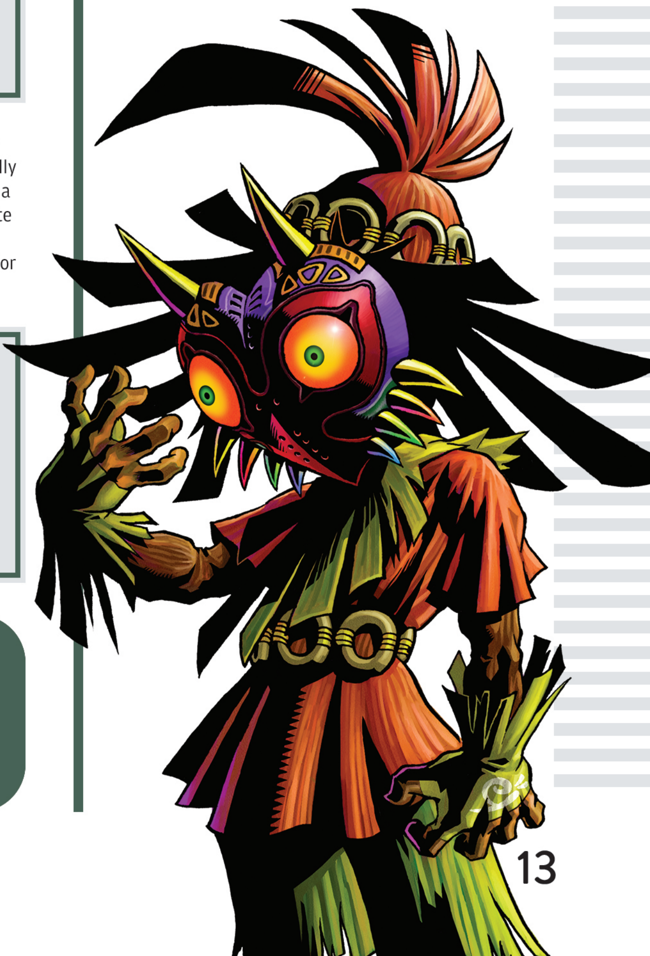
IF THE APOCALYPTIC conditions you face with Kirby in his exploration of the Forgotten Land aren't quite bleak enough for your liking, then consider the more severe level of destruction on display in 13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim on April 12! We've got fresh hands-on impressions to present to you about this one if you'll kindly flip to Page 56.

> I've got to say that I'm pretty well pleased with this slate of releases as we head out of winter and into spring. Though it'll be tough to want to head outside and soak up the sunny weather with so many new video games drawing me back to my TV! Maybe I'll just commit to playing my Switch as a portable more often than I usually do and head outside with it and these games in tow in order to experience the best of both worlds! — **LUCAS**

PERFECTLY TIMED TO arrive right as we're finalizing this apocalypse-themed NF issue is arguably Nintendo's most apocalyptic game ever, The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask! It followed Banjo-Kazooie into the Nintendo 64 selection of games available to Expansion Pass-tier Nintendo Switch Online subscribers.

Banjo was the January game and Majora took the February spot, so is Nintendo flirting with something like consistency here? Just one new N64 game per month is still rather slow, but it is better than going for several months in a row with zero new additions, as the NES and SNES selections have often done since they began.

For more on Majora's Mask, flip into our central feature and look for the scary moon!



DOWNLOAD

Kirby

STAR OF THE ESHOP!

When Nintendo first expanded to offering digital, downloadable games, I thought their most famous franchises would fill the eShops' virtual shelves. They never have. Only one A-lister has made the eShops a priority: Kirby! Let's look back on each of his download-exclusive offerings from years past.

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

KIRBY FIGHTERS DELUXE

INCLUDED WITHIN 2014'S Kirby: Triple Deluxe was a pair of side dish game designs that the developers at HAL must have loved, because a few months later they launched "Deluxe" versions of the two of them as standalone downloadable titles!

Kirby Fighters Deluxe asked the question "What if Smash Bros. only starred different versions of Kirby?" So we got a Smash-alike fighting game in which your character choices were Sword Kirby, Beam Kirby, Bomb Kirby and more of his most iconic alter egos (and all their fabulous hats). It was a great idea for a "Smash Bros. Lite" game to be sold for just $6.99 in the 3DS eShop, and it blew away the digital competition by essentially bringing the full retail adventure's level of quality into the downloadable domain.

HAL again must have been thrilled at the reception this particular download received, as we'll soon see it was just the first of many of this style of game!

AUGUST 2014

DEDEDE'S DRUM DASH DELUXE

THE SECOND SPIN-OUT from Triple Deluxe landed in an entirely different genre: rhythm gaming! King Dedede hopped and bopped to the beat in his own starring role in Dedede's Drum Dash Deluxe.

This, again, was a great call for a game design to use as a standalone digital experience – it was the kind of game you could call up from your 3DS menu and play around with for just a few songs' worth of time, then close it out again and move along to meatier titles. The gameplay involved King Dedede constantly jumping off drums that lined the bottom of the 3DS' lower screen, bouncing up off of them in beat with the background music and attempting to collect coins along the way. Who knew that King Dedede had such a good sense of rhythm? Then again, the movie Happy Feet did teach us that penguins love music.

AUGUST 2014

TEAM KIRBY CLASH DELUXE

I'M PRAISING KIRBY for his more prominent presence in Nintendo's eShops compared to other top-tier company mascots, but this third eShop-exclusive appearance only earned my ire when I reviewed it five years ago. Because it was presented as a money-grabbing "free-to-start" download!

Nintendo's thankfully shifted away from that kind of pricing strategy these days, but back in 2017 they were more than happy to embrace the practice that had made so many mobile developers so rich. It's unfortunate, because Team Kirby Clash Deluxe – spun out from Planet Robobot – was not a terrible idea! It reimagined four of Kirby's classic Copy Abilities as standalone characters who together formed kind of a Dungeons & Dragons adventuring party. You were meant to recruit friends to play it with you . . . but I doubt many ever did.

APRIL 2017

KIRBY'S BLOWOUT BLAST

HAPPILY, KIRBY'S REPUTATION in the eShop quickly recovered from the disappointment of Team Kirby Clash Deluxe when this 3D Kirby game arrived just a few months later! Yes, we're celebrating Kirby and the Forgotten Land as Kirby's first fully 3D story-driven adventure in this issue, but Blowout Blast was a key stepping stone that the developers at HAL used to get to that point.

Expanding on a very brief, three-level proof of concept called Kirby 3D Rumble that was included in Kirby: Planet Robobot, Blowout Blast challenged the walking vacuum cleaner to dash through small score attack stages, suck up baddies as quickly as possible and blow them back out to blast other baddies out of existence. There was no story to speak of and a five-minute time limit on each stage ensured that you couldn't stop to smell the roses for too long, but it still gave us our first real taste of the "Kirby in 3D" gameplay that we'll soon get to enjoy in much more elaborate fashion in the Forgotten Land!

JULY 2017

SUPER KIRBY CLASH

SINCE IT DEBUTED just one month after the shiny new Switch hardware stole the spotlight in March 2017 and since it was widely derided for its predatory pricing structure, Team Kirby Clash Deluxe was not received too well on the 3DS. Its creators really believed in it, though, so they brought the same idea back again – this time on the Switch – two years later.

Super Kirby Clash is once again a multiplayer-encouraging boss rush with four different Kirby characters each taking on unique party roles: healer, tank, distance fighter, etc. It looks spectacular, admittedly, as Kirby Star Allies had brought the world of Dream Land into the HD era and HAL had those assets on hand to be able to beautify this spin-off in its transition from the low-res 3DS.

And yet, this game was still offered as free-to-play. An in-game currency called Gem Apples had to be spent to access any of its content, and those were limited, only given out slowly by a time-gated apple tree. If you got impatient, of course, you could always open your wallet to speed things up! (Blech.)

SEPTEMBER 2019

KIRBY FIGHTERS 2

HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED the trend yet? Yes, the Kirby series has had six different eShop exclusive releases across the 3DS and the Switch, but four of them have been variations on the "It's Smash Bros., just with a bunch of different Kirbys" concept. A little more variety in genre would be more than welcome if HAL continues to supply this series with more downloadable-only adventures in the future.

Still, Kirby Fighters 2 is praiseworthy in the fact that it ditched the money-grabbing mobile-inspired pricing practices of the two Clash titles and instead offered its full slate of content for a one-time investment of $19.99. What's more, it broke free of fully relying on the Copy Abilities of Kirby's past games by introducing the all-new Wrestler Kirby, who came complete with a glorious lucha libre mask.

All in all, Kirby's eShop career so far hasn't been truly sensational, but he has done more for the digital storefronts than the likes of Mario or Link! NF

SEPTEMBER 2020

Mario Kart Gets a Major Boost!

A mind-boggling *48 extra courses* will be added via the new Booster Course Pass DLC.

ACCORDING TO NINTENDO'S third quarter earnings for fiscal year 2022, Mario Kart 8 Deluxe has overtaken the original Super Mario Bros. to become the second best-selling title in company history. Now that Deluxe has cleared a whopping 43,350,000 units — which doesn't even include the 8,460,000 sales of its Wii U version — one wonders why Nintendo had thus far failed to capitalize on its popularity with an onslaught of updates.

Five years, a mixed reality experiment and a money-grubbing gacha gremlin later, Nintendo has announced the new Mario Kart 8 Deluxe Booster Course Pass, set to introduce even more remastered tracks from throughout the franchise's history. How many, you may wonder? Could it be 16, as with the Wii U version's DLC two-pack? Nay! We're looking at *48* returning tracks, meaning we're basically getting a whole new game's worth of content!

For $24.99 (or free if you subscribe to Nintendo Switch Online + Expansion Pass), fans will receive six waves of eight courses each, starting March 18 and running through the end of 2023. Wave 1 will include Choco Mountain (N64), Sky Garden (GBA), Shroom Ridge (DS), Coconut Mall (Wii) and Toad Circuit (3DS) — along with Mario Kart Tour's Paris Promenade, Tokyo Blur and Ninja Hideaway, unshackled at last from mobile imprisonment!

Aside from the cold realization that a proper Mario Kart 9 is now even further away than before, the most gnawing concern regarding these new tracks is that the environments don't seem to have received the same level of polish as those from before. Whatever the reason behind the missing extra coat of paint, it likely won't deter all you Kart fans out there from hoping your favorite old course eventually makes the cut! **— TONY**

Take Two on the Way for YIIK

An incoming update pledges to totally overhaul YIIK: A Post-Modern RPG.

"WHY IS YIIK a bad game?" When you Google the game, this question is one of the top results. The only fair way to answer it is with another question: "Why do some people hate YIIK so much?" And that's where it gets complicated.

With beautiful art direction and a "Western Indie-meets-Modern JRPG" concept, this nostalgia-filled trip back to the nigh-apocalyptic days of 1999 seemed destined for success. It got tons of positive attention in the many years leading up to its release. Then it came out, and an avalanche of negativity came storming down. Everything from visual design choices – like the claymation-style run animations – to the story – which takes cues from the real-life death of a Chinese-Canadian tourist in 2013 – were all taken as proof that the game was not only a bad game, but that it was made by bad people.

"The framerate is bad because the devs are lazy!" "The story is exploitative because the devs are immoral!" "The main character is a horrible hipster jerk because he's a self-insert for the game's creators!" That last one was a rumor that was immediately disproven, but many ran with it anyway, presumably out of spite.

That's really what makes YIIK stand out, for better or worse. Plenty of video games feature unlikable-but-fashionable leads, stylishly "choppy" frame skips and stories that allude to real-life tragedies, but few have received a sliver of the venom that YIIK has. For whatever reason, it makes certain people very angry.

And if there's one thing the last decade has shown us, it's if something makes people mad, it's going to get attention. Just as people seemed to love to dunk on the game on social media for likes, others realized that defending it would also bring in views. And so, three years after its initial release, the discourse, fan art and debate around YIIK continues – priming it for a massive overhaul in 2022. YIIK I.V will be a free update that will also serve as a soft relaunch. The battle system, which changes based on what weapon each character uses (record player, camera, katana, etc.) will be "improved" and load times will be reduced. There will also be new cutscenes, characters, bosses and 45 minutes of new music. These added elements will focus on the supporting cast and not Alex, the bearded leading man who's become the target of so many of the game's detractors.

If nothing else, this update proves that the Allanson brothers, the team behind YIIK, are anything but lazy. Instead of running from their game and its negative reception, they are leaning into both, doing their best to address valid criticisms of the game while doubling down on the things fans love about it. We can guess that, despite its low Metacritic score, the game sold well enough to justify the time and money that went into this free follow-up. But will all the extra work that went into making YIIK I.V lead to big sales? I'd say that depends on how well it reviews, but that didn't seem to matter that much the first time it came out! **– JONATHAN**

Don't Fear the Reaper

DEATH'S DOOR

NOBODY'S DYING ANYMORE.

That sounds good, right? Eternal life for all? The only problem is it's turning out to be pretty terrible for the job security of grim reapers.

Death's Door casts you as a small crow who's normally employed as a simple reaper, but who ultimately gets drawn into the grander job of restoring the entire natural order of the world. You must seek out and reap the souls of three Giants whose lives have become especially unnaturally extended – in doing so, you should hopefully set everything that's wrong back to right.

(The story is more complicated than that, of course!)

What isn't complicated at all is the gameplay here. Death's Door offers its players an action-packed, puzzle-solving adventure that's easy to jump right into. It's been described by others as Zelda-like, and that's apt in many ways, but it more than establishes its own unique identity beyond its obvious Hyrulian inspirations.

Most immediately striking is the game's visual style and the way it presents its environments. Your view is an isometric one, giving you an angled bird's-eye look at the lands around you. And the places you explore are so intricately detailed! The paths your little crow scampers on are twisted, overlapping and often intentionally obtuse to discern at first glance. Every area is a maze in a way, challenging you to pick out little visual hints that point toward hidden passageways.

Most of that's optional, but still advisable. You're more than welcome to rush through the quest treating it like a nonstop combat gauntlet, but seeking out secrets like shrines that enhance your life and magic meters will help you in later fight scenes.

And the fight scenes get to be truly intense! Combat really feels perfectly pitched in Death's Door, as there were more times than I could count when I *just* managed to win a battle by the skin of my beak. Heart racing, one HP left, striking the final blow an instant before the final foe could take me out instead . . . it was exhilirating!

Your crow comes equipped with a standard sword for starters, as well as the power to fire arrows from a magic-fueled bow. The ammo/MP system is interesting here, as you recharge your distance attacks by successfully landing melee strikes. That dynamic ensures that you can never fully play it safe by standing out on the fringes of a combat zone – you're forced to get in close at least half the time!

Having to push your beak right up into enemies' faces means you also have to master your movement, and Death's Door emphasizes the ever-enjoyable dodge roll. You'd think, as a crow, your character here might take to the sky to evade enemies. But no! You never leave the ground. You are a flightless bird. So you'll find yourself running up to targets, taking a few swipes, dodge-rolling away from their retaliation, backing off to take a shot or two from afar and then repeating the whole affair until you emerge victorious. (Or don't.) But death in Death's Door isn't too punishing, as you most often just get flung back a ways to the last door you passed through.

One problem I did have with the combat is that you're offered some upgrades to your capabilities as you progress through the game, but they seemed like tiny, nearly inconsequential buffs. For example, I spent hundreds of Souls (this game's currency) to buy a Strength upgrade. Then another one. I thought that, having done so, the early game foes that took two hits to defeat would begin to fall to a single strike instead – but no! I think it took three such upgrades before I finally began to notice a difference, and I was half-finished with the game by then. That was odd.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEVELOPER: ACID NERVE
RATING: T

Another design decision that earned a quizzical eyebrow raise from yours truly was the developers' choice to contextualize all of your little reaper's extra powers as magic. The bow that you begin with isn't an actual object, but a manifestation of light that shoots magical arrows at a cost of one MP apiece. A bit weird. The second power, tossing fireballs, makes more sense as a spell that's being cast – it also charges you a single MP each time you use it. But then you get the Bomb power, and it lets you chuck wall-blasting and foe-exploding orbs of destruction for two MP each. Gameplaywise it still makes sense, especially since it's more powerful and having it be twice as costly to use is understandable, but flavorwise it's weird.

And then you get the Hookshot. But it, too, isn't an object. It's a spell as well, and its cost to cast? Zero. No MP needed. So, uh, why is it a spell at all?

Again, I get it from the perspective of keeping the toolkit streamlined, and I recognize that players could get stuck if the Hookshot did demand MP and our crow hero ran out in the middle of a big Hookshotting platforming sequence. I just think it would have been a more consistent choice to make all these powers be tied to actual objects.

Since that's what everything else the crow gathers is, after all! Being a corvid, your reaper loves to find and pick up "Shiny Things," which are extra treasures that deepen the Death's Door lore. You discover several of them as you explore – as well as four alternate melee weapons.

Running around the world to find all these things was delightful. This quest is loosely linear, as your path forward is always clear, but you also have the freedom to backtrack and fool around as much as you want. I enjoyed getting partway through the dungeons – far enough to gain a new power like bomb-chucking – then leaving to go roam around past areas and blow up the cracked walls I'd noticed in earlier hours.

Another notable highlight was the goofy cast of characters. As a game named "Death's Door" things can get bleak in this world and its story, but oddballs like the security guard named Baul Plart and the soup chef Jefferson (who is a squid unsuccessfully masquerading as a human) all keep things light. There are even cheerful little flower spirits who will follow you around and smile!

All in all, Death's Door is itself quite a Shiny Thing. Incredibly, most of the game was crafted by just a few developers: a tiny team of two called Acid Nerve and only a handful of collaborators beyond their core duo. If games of this caliber are now possible by such small indie groups, I can't wait to see what the future holds for the industry. At this rate, video games will never die! **– LUCAS**

9.0

Afterlife Ambassador

SPIRITFARER

MID-2020 MARKED A quiet debut for Spiritfarer, but its last update just dropped this past December, so it's a good time to take a look at it now if you missed it when it first launched.

If you haven't heard anything about Spiritfarer and you enjoy amazing narratives filled with varying emotions coupled with light platforming and farming/crafting simulation, then drop everything and go buy this game! If you need a bit more convincing, read on, as this was one of the most surprising and emotive games I've ever played.

You play as the unflappable Stella (and optionally a second player can play as Stella's pet cat, Daffodil). The two of them have just relieved Charon of his duty of ferrying people to the afterlife through the Everdoor.

Commandeering his ship, Stella explores islands, hunting for both resources and lost souls (all of them anthropomorphic animals) who are ready to depart the mortal plane. All of the animals Stella encounters have a personal relationship or bond interwoven into Stella's main story, and the overarching plot is truly something to behold. It was much more . . . *adult* than I expected, dealing with complex drama and jaded opinions.

While the animals are on board, and oftentimes before, Stella will feed them, buy them things they need, provide shelter for them and run errands that make them feel at peace with leaving the world. This requires gathering materials to build and cook with.

Much of the first part of the game is exploration — figuring out how to attain each material needed, then eventually how to become self-sustaining. Stella can build fields for crops, a windmill, a smithy, a foundry and much more.

Each animal has an event that triggers under certain criteria — like passing through thunderstorms or meteor showers — where a rare substance can be obtained by playing a minigame of sorts on the ship.

Finally attaining each ingredient and piecing a dish together or finishing a structure is rewarding, and feeding a spirit their favorite dish or improving their house is its own bonus, as they all emote in different ways. Some fawn over you (like Stanley), some mentor you (like Summer) and others are more gruff or strict (like Bruce and Mickey or Elena). You learn the eccentricities of each and the intricacy of their personalities through conversations and how they react to everything — and even each other! It's absolutely brilliant!

There have been three content updates since Spiritfarer was first released. The Lily update introduced another sister, the Beverly update welcomed an elderly chicken and the Farewell update added Jackie and Daria. Each brought new recipes, materials and narratives which are fascinating and scripted well.

While I want to tell everyone about how heartbreaking, funny or shocking each spirit story is, it would ruin the myriad surprises. Suffice it to say, if you don't shed a tear after at least one of these stories, you may have lost all empathy!

Spiritfarer isn't without fault. The game doesn't explain that there's no timetable, so I felt rushed at first and was worried I was messing up. But if you relax and go slow, it just means you'll need to feed things more often. Crops can't rot, you can't burn food and livestock and spirits won't die of hunger, but they will certainly let their hunger and disappointment be known!

The game did crash a few times, but it seems to be more stable after the updates. There are few consequences and it's more focused on the journey than the destination. It's one of those rarities that *everyone* should experience, and it works well with small playing sessions, but is also hard to put down! **— BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: THUNDER LOTUS GAMES
RATING: T

9.5

The Duel of the Discs

WINDJAMMERS 2

HAVING PREVIOUSLY PLAYED the 2018 Switch port of 1994's Windjammers from Data East, I was excited to take this long-requested sequel for a spin. Dotemu has taken the first game's formula of head-to-head Frisbee-chucking Pong-like battles and expanded nearly every element, as a good sequel should, thought this modern entry eschews the great spritework of the original for dazzling hand-drawn art that works just as brilliantly.

The six original characters return – with all of their stats adjusted – and four new players have been added as well. That makes for plenty of variety in the roster, and it's fun to experiment with each Jammer's individual styles. There are new stages as well, also each with their own quirk; a Casino level changes the points for each goal, while the Junkyard will have you ricocheting off of mid-field obstacles. All this variety is great and fresh, but the real change comes in the gameplay.

Windjammers was always a title that was easy to pick up, but tough to master. This entry has added jumping, deflecting and directing shots with fighting game controls. These new moves add a lot of strategy, tension and excitement to matches. Catching a flopping disc in the air and chucking it down can really surprise an opponent, and you can even roll the disc on its side to spin right into the goal.

Also available is an EX move that is charged with a bar but can also be executed under a spinning disc. These can be deflected and returned using good timing and skill.

My big issue came from the catch button also being the dash button. Sometimes I would be ready to catch and just dash off for a miss.

In the arcade mode, you choose between two opponents throughout a championship. Bonus games appear after a few matches. The beloved Dog Distance returns, where you throw a disc and then control a pup who must avoid obstacles to retrieve it. I wish there were a way to play it right from the title menu – it's great fun! The new minigame is Disc Attack, where a clay pigeon machine fires at your player and you must attempt to catch and smash each projectile.

Versus Mode allows you to compete with a local opponent in a single match. This is so bare-bones it's disappointing: There should be many more opportunities to change variables or rules for each match, and a rematch option would have been appreciated too.

The most disappointing mode for me was Online Mode. While there are more options for matches, I was only able to find a few other players to have matches with. This is concerning, because many of the game's features – like leaderboards and the like – are found online, and it hasn't been released for that long. And with the game releasing on so many other platforms, it's a bummer the cross-play is only between Xbox and PC.

All the new bells and whistles are great, but I lost interest fairly quickly, and aforementioned issues hold it back from being worth the $20 asking price. **– BRETT**

7.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: DOTEMU RATING: E

Return of the Freelance Police

SAM & MAX SAVE THE WORLD

ONE OF THE late, great Telltale Games' earliest titles from 2006 is back with a fully revamped remaster! The six-foot canine detective and his hyperkinetic rabbity pal have been given new life by a team called Skunkape Games, comprised of key stalwarts from the original development team.

This remaster updates visuals, sound and controls to modern standards in line with the latter-day Telltale works or newer point-and-click titles like Life is Strange. Unlike those more dramatic tales, though, Sam & Max explicitly dabbles in the world of comedy, and fortunately its sense of humor has aged fairly well. Comedy games can often miss the mark by going for broad humor and low-hanging fruit, but Sam & Max's dialogue-driven puzzles set the stage perfectly for lighthearted vaudevillian routines and clever wordplay.

While much of the humor and writing acts as a time-capsule for the mid-'00s – included episodes feature send-ups of reality TV, a pre-social media internet and a frenzied election campaign against an animated Abe Lincoln statue stuffed to the gills with Bush-era political humor (a series highlight) – Save the World manages to remain enjoyable and relevant by avoiding humor that punches down with vulgarity, instead staying in a lane of broad absurdity.

This first season centers around a brainwashing conspiracy that acts as a loose connecting thread between each standalone episode, resulting in a few satisfying payoffs by the end. With each episode taking two to four hours to complete, it's perfect for short bursts of play.

The writing was always this game's strength, but anyone who played the original can tell you that the graphics and presentation were always a bit lacking, even for 2006. By adding dynamic lighting, uncompressed audio and character models readjusted to fit creator Steve Purcell's original concepts, the visuals now match up to the strength of the writing. Simply put, Sam & Max has never looked this good or played this well!

As for the gameplay, it remains largely unchanged. The game is split into six parts – originally released digitally on a monthly schedule – but all six are presented here as one complete package. Across each episode, players take control of Sam and Max as they solve simple puzzles and exhaust dialogue options with anyone who's willing to talk.

This is a retro-styled adventure game through and through, and while there's no shortage of these now compared to the light selection of 2006, they still hold up as touchstones for fans of the genre. Save the World's streamlined verb-free take on point-and-click design remains enjoyable to this day and makes the entire game's narrative easy to sit back and enjoy without getting stumped for hours. Remakes rarely highlight the strengths of a game this well! **– JOHN-CHARLES**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SKUNKAPE GAMES DEVELOPERS: SKUNKAPE GAMES & TELLTALE GAMES RATING: T

Telltale's Tale of Time Travel

SAM & MAX: BEYOND TIME AND SPACE

HOT OFF THE heels of their first remaster, Skunkape Games has swiftly delivered a stellar follow-up with a remastered version of Sam & Max: Beyond Time and Space. Across the full pantheon of Telltale Games' library, the original version of this game always stood as one of the studio's best.

In the further adventures of the freelance police, Telltale managed to refine the tone, design, plotting, pacing, music . . . honestly *everything* in their sophomore outing. This second season finds our heroes facing off against demons, time-traveling mariachis and the bureaucratic red tape of the devil himself. On paper, it sounds thematically all over the place, but everything comes together beautifully by the end of the five-episode arc.

Once again, Skunkape's updated the game with many of the same enhanced visuals and sound, and has taken everything another extra mile further for Beyond Time and Space. On top of improved graphics, scenes have also been readjusted with new dramatic staging, new props and new animation. Much like the first Sam & Max remaster, this results in a game that actually feels as cool as your one weird friend described it 10 years ago.

The core gameplay remains unchanged from the previous game. The point-and-click controls have been translated well to a controller, but sometimes the overly busy set dressing of this sequel can result in your cursor getting a bit lost at times – great for finding hidden jokes, but a tad more annoying for some of the more time-sensitive puzzles encountered throughout.

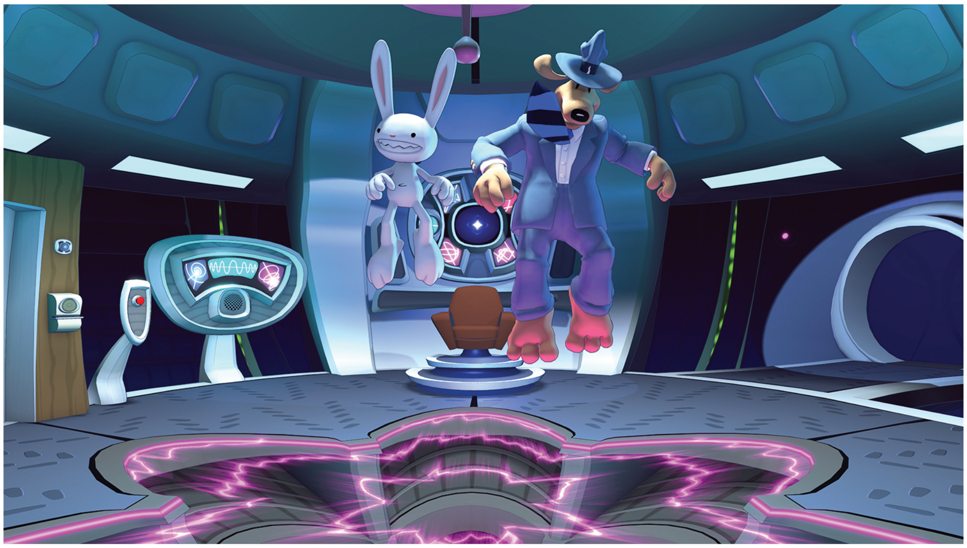
Fortunately, the writing and puzzle design in Beyond Time and Space is firing on all cylinders here. I found myself laughing out loud at more jokes than I honestly anticipated. The banter between characters is at its sharpest and is helped by some hilarious line delivery, especially by Sam and Max's voice actors.

All five episodes here are enjoyable, though I found the second a bit of a chore to play through with its more plodding writing and design. I felt this way a decade ago, and I still feel this way now. I can easily forgive that, though, since Episode 4, "Chariots of the Dogs," remains one of *the* best episodes of anything Telltale ever made. Fans of Day of the Tentacle will find a lot to love in Sam & Max's scaled-back twist on time travel shenanigans as the cornerstone episode of the season.

Skunkape has really delivered on the goods here, folks. They've taken one of the best modern adventure games and updated it to something far beyond its former glory. Their upcoming remaster of Telltale's final Sam & Max game should be one to watch! **– JOHN-CHARLES**

9.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SKUNKAPE GAMES DEVELOPERS: SKUNKAPE GAMES & TELLTALE GAMES RATING: T



Golf: The Post-Apocalyptic Pastime

GOLF CLUB WASTELAND

IF WORSE COMES to worst and we face the actual end of human civilization here on planet Earth, don't worry! You'll be able to book passage off-world – you just need to happen to be one of the most disgustingly rich people alive. Then you'll be all set!

Golf Club Wasteland presents a vision of the future in which Earth as we know it is no more, but a group of mega-wealthy one-percenters were able to escape the apocalypse and relocate their lives to new gated communities built on Mars. Now, as a jaunty little diversion from time to time, they occasionally travel back to the ruined Earth and use its heaps of rubble and ash as an obstacle-laden golf course!

You suit up as one of the lucky few, taking a break from whatever privileged life you lead on the red planet to venture back to humanity's homeworld with golf club in hand. No need to worry about crowd noise while you're lining up your putts or any other golfers getting irritated at your slow pace of play: Everyone else is dead! It's the most peaceful afternoon on the links ever.

You could maybe classify this as a sports game – it is built around golf, after all – but it's chiefly a physics puzzler mashed up together with a platformer. You don't control your golfer's movements – he just uses his jetpack to automatically relocate himself to the spot where the ball lands after each swing. But the game design's still got platformer DNA, as you have to skillfully navigate the ball one stroke at a time to one safe surface after another.

And there aren't many! Early holes ease you into the action, of course, but soon enough Golf Club Wasteland reveals its true nature as an unforgiving beast of a game that demands perfection at every turn.

It isn't frustrating, though! You're given as many chances as you want to make it through these mazes, and if you ever run into an obstacle that you just can't overcome, the game pops in with an option to let you skip ahead to the next level.

I never skipped. I didn't mind my scorecard climbing to embarrassingly lofty stroke totals, as puzzling out the proper pathway through each level's arrangement of pitfalls and dialing in the exact right angle and power level with which to swing at each step along the way was relaxing for me. I failed a lot, but that made victory all the sweeter when I finally achieved it.

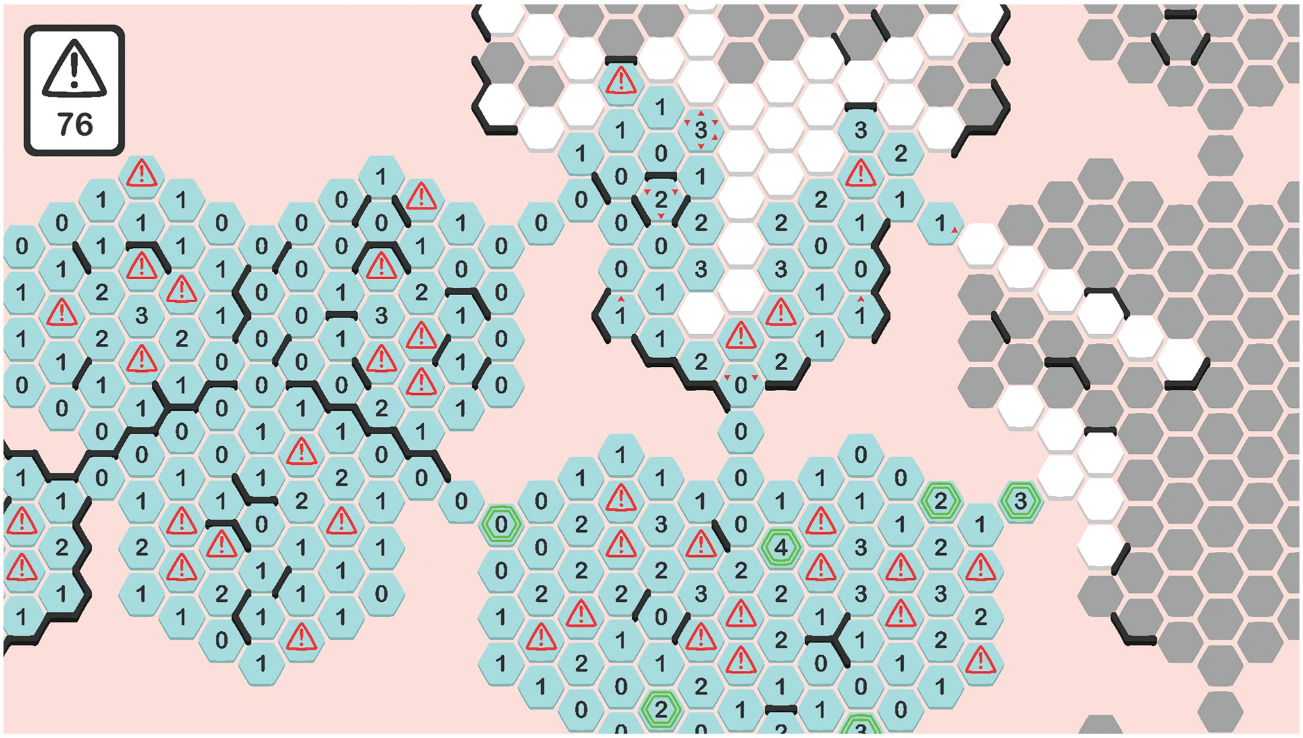
Examples: You might have to get your golf ball to land precisely on a series of tree stumps without letting it fall into water between them. You might have to ricochet a shot off of a crumbling wall and through a broken window to climb up a skyscraper. There may be wildlife to avoid, like ball-snatching squirrels or slippery-backed giraffes. (They survived the "Great Catastrophe" when humans couldn't, it seems.)

All along you also get to listen to a Mars radio station playing songs and hosting interviews, and that fills in the story of just what happened here and what life is like for the remaining few now. It's brilliant.

I was able to pick up Golf Club Wasteland on sale for just $3.99, but even at its normal price of $9.99 it is more than worthy of your consideration. A few extra bucks is no issue for you, right? You're mega-wealthy!
– LUCAS

SWITCH PUBLISHER: UNTOLD TALES DEVELOPER: DEMAGOG STUDIO RATING: T

9.0



Minesweeping in a Honeycomb

HEXCEED

THREE DECADES AGO, the home computer owners of the early '90s were dipping their toes into the world of PC gaming. Whether they intended to use their machines for entertainment or not, a couple of free games nevertheless called for their attention, installed by default on systems running early versions of Microsoft's Windows. Most of these new gamers spent their time getting acquainted with the digital edition of the classic card game Solitaire that was included, but for an experience that couldn't be replicated on a tabletop, there was Minesweeper.

A logic puzzle themed around the job of bomb detection, Minesweeper challenged players to look at a grid of grey squares and identify which spots were safe . . . and which ones were hiding deadly explosives! You'd click a square to get started, and doing so would reveal a number clue to let you know how many mines were lurking in the eight spaces immediately surrounding that starting square. Using that bit of information and combining it with the clues from other safe squares scattered around, you'd deduce the positions where bombs must be hiding, then flag them. If you made it through the whole grid and flagged every mine, you won! If you made a mistake, though, and errantly clicked a bomb spot thinking it was safe, well . . . BOOM!

Now, 30 years later, Hexceed is here to revive that feeling of explosive embarrassment. It is, quite simply, Minesweeper played on a hexagonal grid instead of an array of squares. For starters, this makes more sense than Minesweeper used to: Every number clue here points to a bomb that is directly adjacent to one of the six sides of its position. (Minesweeper's mines could be right next to a clue spot, or diagonally adjacent, only making contact at the corner.) So Hexceed's setup, for starters, is somewhat superior.

This game goes deeper, though, by introducing new kinds of clues as you make your way through more and more levels — and that's where Hexceed loses some steam. The logic wrinkles make sense eventually, but none of them are explained in plain text when they first appear. You have to learn by doing . . . which is *fine*, but I would have loved to at least have the option to pop up a little box with a few lines of tutorial text. Maybe a cute little cartoon character could host those moments?

That's another thing Hexceed is lacking: personality. It's lifeless in its presentation, which, again, is *fine* for a simple time-killing puzzler, but I feel like it could have done more.

One major positive point, though, is the soundtrack. The music here is so chill and endlessly listenable. It's the perfect vibe, just existing there in the background as you tap away at one spot after another. Also welcome were the lower stakes compared to Minesweeper: The old game ended with one wrong move, but here you get a buzz to indicate your error and you get to move on. Multiple errors erases some of your progress, but not all, so you can always recover and finish the current map.

I've had fun with Hexceed, but it feels like a first pass at an idea that could be cleaned up in several areas. Here's hoping it doesn't bomb so its devs keep it sweeping! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: TOASTIELABS RATING: E

7.5

Excavation and Exploration

TERRARIA: JOURNEY'S END

REJOICE, FELLOW TERRARIANS: the Journey's End update has finally hit the Switch! My youngest son Joseph and I have been playing Terraria for quite a while now, so we were excited to finally experience the definitive addition to the popular 2D explorationy sandbox creative battler.

The most immediate change you'll notice after the jazzy new intro is the control scheme. With the update, the user interface has been upgraded with numerous possibilities including touch controls and a setup that more closely matches the one used by desktop players. Unfortunately, you will have this new scheme foisted upon you with no choice in the matter. Having the control scheme remapped without a warning was more than a bit annoying, but with a little bit of perseverance we were able to get to something we were more accustomed to.

There's so much that was added and improved that it's hard to find a starting point! Upon starting you will see that many of the graphics and sprites have been updated. There are new tunes, too! Terraria always had a fantastic soundtrack, and now there's more of it in many of the areas both above and under the ground. Music from the cancelled Terraria Otherworld game has also been added (although you have to work a little to get it if you're starting a new world from scratch). In addition to new graphics and music, over 1,000 new items have been added, as well as new towns-people (and town pets!), new modes of play, new mini-biomes, new critters, enemies and bosses and more, plus a bestiary and an optional golf game!

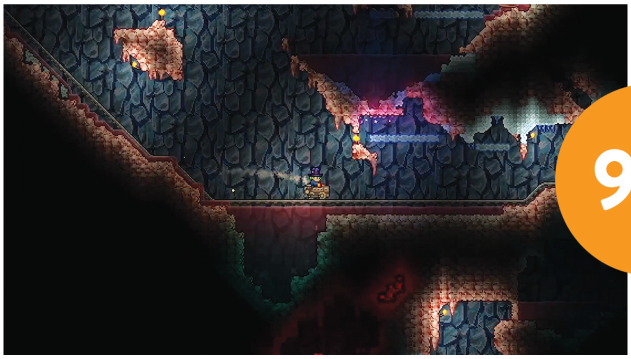
Joseph and I really enjoyed the new Master Mode difficulty. If you consider yourself a Terraria king, Master Mode will take your crown and smack you with it. The difficulty is really popped up here – even the lowly slimes will have you meeting your maker early in a playthrough! This mode has a high risk/high reward function to it, with increased drops offsetting the pain of consis-tent death . . . to a point. You see, in Master Mode you lose *all* the money on your person when you're slain. Not only that, enemies can pick up your dropped cash and run off with it! Bosses have new behaviors and more health, but also have increased chances of dropping rare items for your trouble.

The fun really comes in with Journey Mode, which is a kind of "creative mode" version of Terraria. With this newly added mode, you're given complete control over many aspects of gameplay, from simple things like the time of day, the weather, the level of difficulty and the ability to outright freeze time to the really fun stuff like activating the invulnerable "God Mode" and changing the spawn rate of enemies. (For a really good time try changing the spawn rate to 10 during a Blood Moon event!)

One of the most important aspects of Journey Mode is Research: the ability to duplicate nearly every item in the game once the necessary amount of that item has been given to the research process, which destroys the item(s) in the process. However, fully researching an item grants the ability to duplicate it infinitely. Luckily many things such as weapons and rare items require only one specimen to complete the necessary research, so you won't lose something that may have taken significant work to obtain. One important thing to remember: Journey Mode can *only* be played with Journey Mode characters, and vice versa.

We really enjoyed our time with Journey's End and hope this isn't The End for Terraria! **– THOR**

DLC PUBLISHER: 505 GAMES
DEVELOPER: PIPEWORKS STUDIO
RATING: T



Trapped in a Time Loop of Terror

TWELVE MINUTES

I WISH I could go back in time and stop myself from playing this game.

Twelve Minutes tells the tale of a time loop: A young husband arrives home to his small apartment after a day at work, he's greeted by his wife and they share a few minutes with each other, then an angry police officer barges in, tries to arrest the wife and knocks the husband out cold if he attempts to interfere.

Then it's back to the start. Time is rewound to the moment the husband walked through the front door on his return home from work, and it's up to you as the player to use your knowledge of past events to try to bring about a different future in which the poor guy doesn't end up unconscious on the floor while his wife's being hauled off to jail.

It's an intriguing setup, and one I was eager to jump into given my love of time travel stories. But, again, I wish I'd just skipped playing this – because the story ends up taking a turn into a wild, gross scenario that is so unpleasant it manages to erase anything that's interesting about the time travel trappings containing the tale.

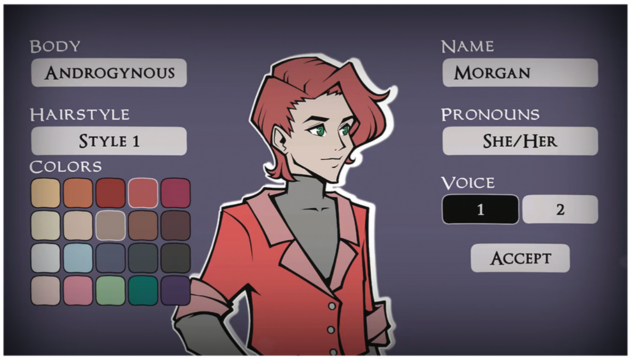
What's worse, beyond the story unavoidably going into disgusting territory about halfway through the game's playtime, it never resolves in any understandable way. Discussion threads in online forums are filled with players who've finished playing, but who still have no idea what was actually happening. Count me among them! Is this story meant to be taken literally? Or is the husband, our player character, mentally ill and simply inventing this whole scenario to try to make some sense of the life situation in which he finds himself emotionally trapped? Who knows!

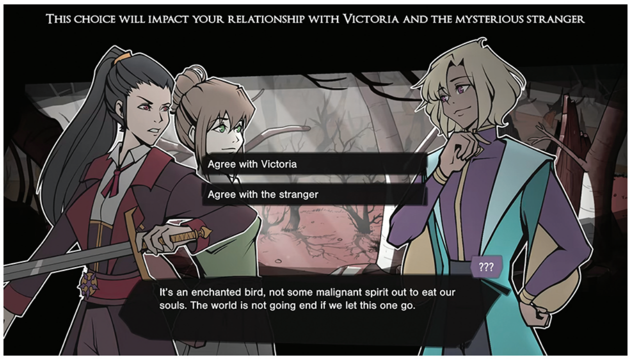
More problematic still is how this game functions *as* a game – it's often difficult to know how to make further progress after you've picked up and examined every object in the apartment and read through every branch in the available conversation trees, so you can easily get stuck in the loop yourself, just seeing and doing the same things again and again. It's especially deflating when you have what you think is a eureka moment, but then the game denies you. "I'll hide in the closet, then leap out at the policeman with a knife!" Nope. The game's already decided for you that that won't work.

It's trial and error (and error, and error) until you complete the exact right sequence of moves to trigger a story continuation . . . for a story that is not really worth continuing at all. It's frustrating as a video game experience, giving you no real sense of payoff since the only thing you earn is a sense of regret for suffering through it all. It might've worked better as a movie – they did manage to get A-list Hollywood talents Daisy Ridley, James McAvoy and Willem Dafoe to voice the characters here, so there's that – but even then, Twelve Minutes would not have won any Academy Awards. **– LUCAS**

6.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE
RATING: M





The Alchemy of Personality

ARCADIA FALLEN

IF YOU'VE EVER wanted a video game experience that feels like a Dungeons & Dragons one-shot, Arcadia Fallen will give that to you.

This visual novel from Galdra Studios lets you make a customizable character and drops you into a lore-rich modern fantasy world full of colorful characters and environments. You take on the role of a fledgling alchemist in a small village, where distrust of magic arises and leads to a much larger conflict.

You won't be rolling any dice, but like many RPG tabletop experiences, the game gives you great agency, providing many ways to make the story your own in its seven-hour play time.

The dialogue system is one of the game's greatest strengths. I was impressed at how much variety it offered, and how it allowed me to express what kind of character I wanted to be. Even during a simple conversation with the main party, my character could react with a range of emotions and attitudes, including diplomatic, joking, annoyed, scared and happy. These choices impacted the scene's tone and mood.

In addition to dialogue, Arcadia Fallen gives opportunities where you must make choices, affecting both the world and your companions. The game gives you a heads-up when the decisions are big, but you won't know the consequences right away. In one instance, I had to help Ann, a mage scholar, decide if her fears of the outside world were valid or hindering her, and this determined a part of her future going forward. You can also romance party members.

Together, these choice-based systems work together to provide a personal experience and increase replay value. My path through the game won't look exactly like anyone else's, and I appreciated the work and detail it took to make that happen.

Arcadia Fallen also features a puzzle system – both as a way to combat foes and make new recipes with alchemy. The mechanic involves turning three outer circles and one inner circle to create specific color and symbol patterns. The puzzles aren't as deep as the dialogue system, but they were a fun aspect of the game that offered some challenges, especially with optional alchemy recipes near the end.

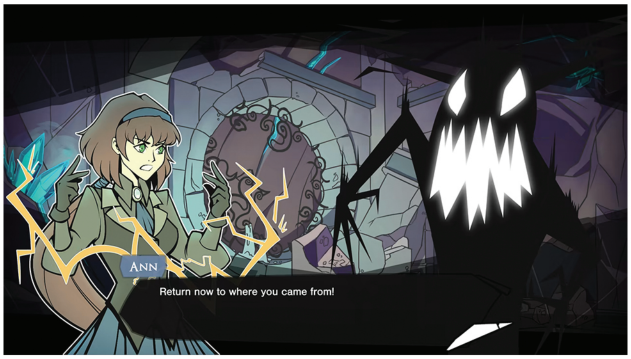
Arcadia Fallen weaves a deep and interesting fantasy tale from start to finish, but the game wrapped up its most dramatic moments too quickly. Each chapter builds up to a specific conflict – but each one was resolved in a few minutes. Then, you're right back in town to work on the next step of your journey.

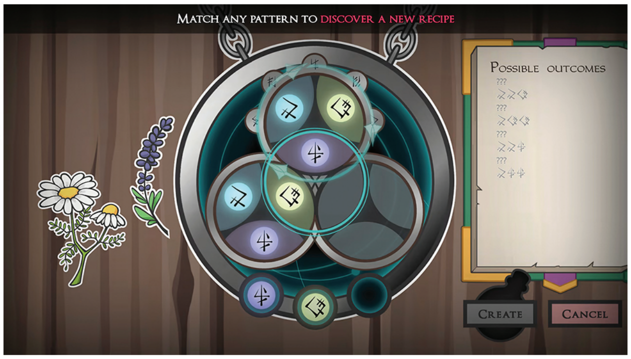
The worst example of this is found in the ending. The final conflict and the resolution that followed felt extremely rushed, and I was disappointed after becoming so invested in this world. The last chapter needed to be longer and more meaningful, especially after the build-up to it had so much going for it.

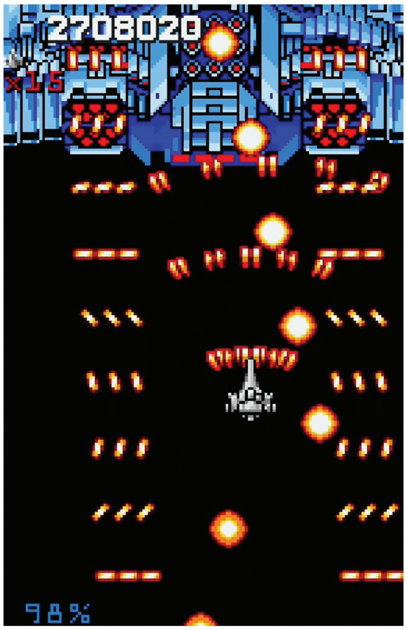
Narrative issues aside, I haven't played many games that gave me as much agency as Arcadia Fallen, and who doesn't want to be the hero (or anti-hero) of a fantasy story? Check this one out if you're looking for a game where you can really be yourself – or someone completely different! **– MAGGIE**

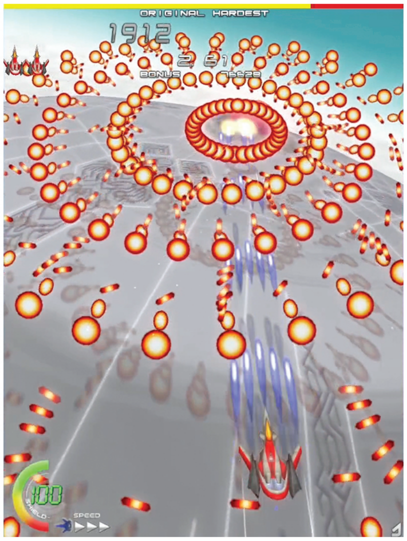
8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: GALDRA STUDIOS RATING: T









Shmups!

ESCHATOS

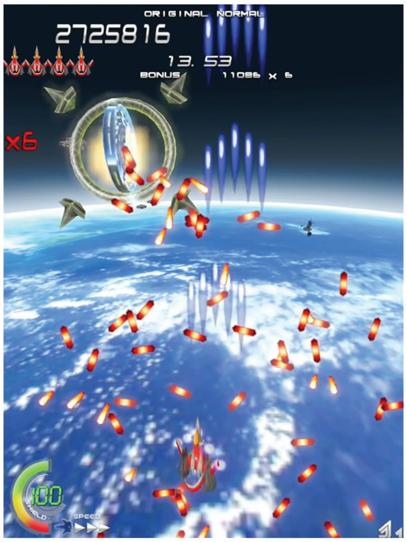
BACK IN 1989, a new game called Ordyne debuted for the TurboGrafx-16 console. I have no idea what it was about. No magazines were writing about it, there was no internet to consult for reviews and I was the only kid in town who had that system, so there was no one local to ask about it. All I knew about Ordyne was what the box told me: It was a colorful but generic shoot-'em-up, and it cost $70. Wait, $70?! For a shmup? On a console nobody owned? There must be more to this, right? There was only one way to find out. I bought the game, confident that for that price, there must be something secretly incredible about it.

There wasn't! It was a good-enough game, seven stages long, packed with bog-standard shmup action. After I memorized the levels (which didn't take very long), I could beat the whole thing in about 30 minutes. That task required a little short-term memory workout, but nothing about the game was all that memorable. After I'd seen it all, I put it in a box and didn't think about it again until I booted up Eschatos for the purpose of penning this review.

"It's Ordyne all over again!" That was my first reaction to playing through it, though on paper, many of the details between the two are different. Eschatos costs $27 in the Switch eShop, not $70. It actually contains three games: the marquee title, as well as two previously hard-to-find WonderSwan shmups, Judgement Silversword and Cardinal Sins. (For its original release 20 years ago, Judgement Silversword only had a total of 500 cartridges manufactured! They're incredibly rare!)

Eschatos is also not a cute and colorful side-scroller like Ordyne. It's instead a fast-paced vertical scroller, best played in TATE mode, featuring your average array of sci-fi spaceships and UFOs.

That said, the feeling is the same. Eschatos isn't being talked about in game magazines (except for this one), and for the price, I expected it to do something special. It doesn't.



Instead, this is a collection of three perfectly fine shmups that dump you into the action right from the get-go, keeping you there for as long as you want to stay. The main game has an endless mode that will really appeal to patient, high score-hunting players with a lot of time on their hands. Otherwise, that campaign will take (you guessed it) about 30 minutes to get through – though even on the easiest difficulty, you aren't likely to see it all without a few continues. To get those continues, you'll need to play a few rounds to earn them, which adds a nice layer of meta progression to the overall structure.

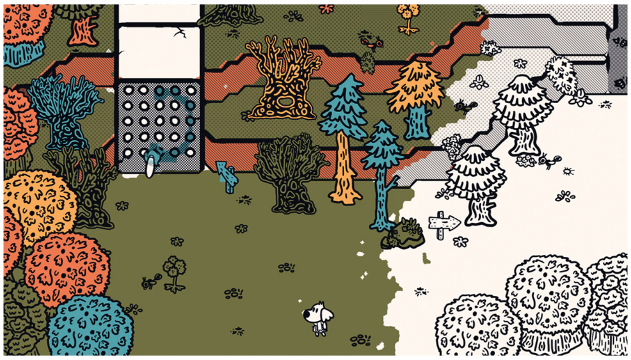
All three games also do a nice job of economizing your toolset. At any given time you can swap between a powerful front-facing laser, a weaker wide shot that covers most of the screen and a shield that protects the front of your ship. You constantly have to choose between which of the three is the best way to handle the screen at hand. It's not rocket science, but it's enough to keep you from falling asleep at the wheel.

Eschatos' dedication to being unremarkable is actually pretty special. They rarely make them this ordinary anymore. Just don't say we didn't warn you! There are no twists here, just bullets.

– JONATHAN

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: QUTE
RATING: E10+



Bring Color Back to the World!

CHICORY: A COLORFUL TALE

APOCALYPSES IN GAMING come in many varieties, but they're rarely as cute as Chicory's. If the thought of fighting across a barren wasteland seems too much to bear, why not paint your way across the end of the world instead?

Wholesome games have been steadily growing in number and in popularity over the past few years, and Chicory, a game about a cute animal world where everything is named after food, feels tailor-made to appeal to those who most often seek out nonviolent gaming experiences.

The game world's recipe contains ingredients borrowed from a few fan-favorite Nintendo titles: a splash of Animal Crossing, a dollop of EarthBound, a pinch of old-school 2D Pokémon. And without any violent encounters to keep the player busy, Chicory borrows a mechanic from another iconic Nintendo game: Mario Paint.

There have been plenty of attempts over the years to combine video games and art, some of which have captured the experience of creative expression better than others. The recent boom in adult coloring books — itself not entirely disconnected from the popularity of wholesome games — has led to the perfect environment for yet another try at a video game art simulator.

This, then, sets the stage for Chicory's particularly low-stakes apocalypse. All of the color has drained out of the world, leaving everything in monochrome. It's your job, as an adorable tiny dog, to use a magic paintbrush to color everything in again.

As someone who has worked as a colorist for comic books in the past, a game about coloring naturally appealed to me on a deep personal level. That said, this also means that I'm not particularly forgiving of Chicory's greatest flaw.

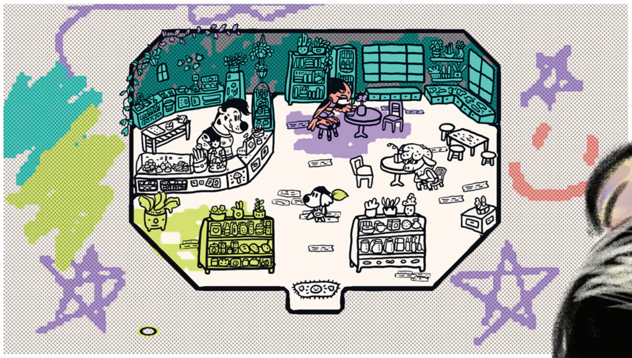
The game itself is fun and sweet; for those who like a more mellow gaming experience, Chicory is a must-play. The big question, though, is whether its Switch port is really the best way to play it. As with all previous art video games, Chicory's controls leave a little something to be desired.

Art video games often struggle with helping players to draw or paint in a comfortable manner, considering that traditional game input methods don't really lend themselves to the artistic experience.

Often, games have come bundled with special controllers for this very reason — Mario Paint had the Super NES Mouse, while the more recent Colors Live comes bundled with a pressure-sensitive stylus to make drawing on the Switch screen more precise. On PC, Chicory players can use a computer mouse with one hand while directing their character via the keyboard with their other hand, and while inelegant, that works well enough.

This experience was never going to translate well to consoles. First-person shooter enthusiasts often say that an analog stick just can't beat a mouse for accuracy, and with Chicory, this is readily apparent.

Thankfully, if you must play Chicory on a console, the Switch is a far better choice than other devices for two reasons. First, when docked in TV Mode, you can use the Joy-Cons' motion controls to draw in mid-air, which, while not perfect, certainly feels more comfortable than using an analog stick.



But Reason #2 is that, for me, the best way to play is Handheld Mode, using the Switch's touchscreen. While fingerpainting doesn't feel great, I dug out an old squish-tipped iPad stylus and used that as a pen, and it worked relatively well. I probably would have preferred to play this on the computer I use for drawing, but I'm aware that I'm going to be a lot harder to please than most people on this point.

Once I got going with the game – and once I discovered button remapping in the options menu to better tailor the experience – I couldn't help but feel nostalgic for the golden age of art games on the Nintendo DS. There are shades of Drawn to Life, Art Academy and even Zelda games like Phantom Hourglass in here, as I navigated the world with one hand pressing buttons and the other drawing shapes on the screen.

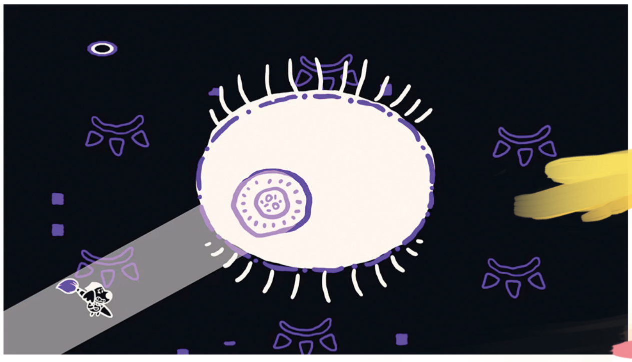
Chicory uses its central gimmick well, with simple but effective puzzles based around coloring in the environment to help traverse across the game world. Those who desire a meaty game experience with plenty of challenge might feel that Chicory comes up a bit short on that point, but the goal here isn't to make the player sweat. Chicory is designed to be charming, simple and cute, and on all those fronts, it succeeds.

As a game that most players can stumble through with enough trial and error without facing much resistance, Chicory is excellent for younger players, offering up a kind of My First RPG experience. There are treasures littered everywhere, and completing quests for NPCs can often result in getting free items, but, in a move borrowed from Animal Crossing, the only items to collect are cosmetic.

It's also worth pointing out that the music, by celebrated composer Lena Raine, is absolutely pitch perfect.

Chicory is a must-play game – one of the best offerings from 2021 and an excellent antidote to more terrifying titles. Depending on your personal control preferences, the Switch might not be the ideal system to use to play it, but if you've ever wished for a roleplaying game coloring book, you'll quickly fall in love with Chicory. **– MATTHEW L.**

8.5



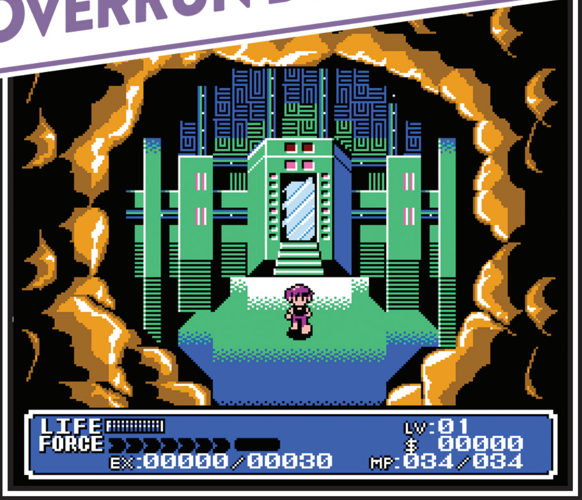
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: FINJI
RATING: E

BY THOR THORVALDSON

APOCALYPSE WOW!

Kirby's encountered apocalypses in the past – but he's far from the only hero to have faced the end of the world. Let's look back on the most memorable extinction-level events in video game history, in order to better prepare ourselves for the future!

OVERRUN BY MUTANTS



CRYSTALIS

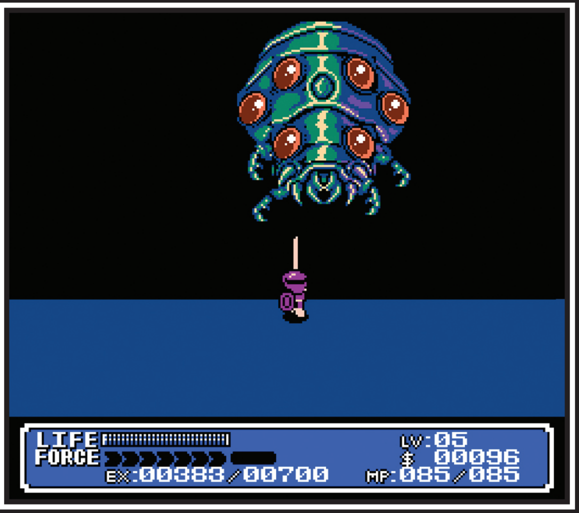
LIFE ON EARTH came to an end on October 1, 1997. Well, most life, that is. What remained were a handful of humans and a whole horde of mutated monsters running amok!

Apocalypse stories have undoubtedly peaked in prominence and popularity here in the Switch generation, but examples of these tales can be traced all the way back to the 8-bit NES era. That's when we got Crystalis, an action-RPG that went on sale in 1990 and predicted a future in which humanity had just seven years left before "The End Day." October 1, 1997 was the date when nuclear war would break out around the globe, blasting nearly every bit of human civilization to smithereens.

But that's all prologue! The game actually picks up 100 years later, when the protagonist awakens from cryogenic sleep and discovers what the world has become a century after the apocalypse. The radiation has caused creatures to mutate into massive, freakish forms and what few humans are left alive are unequipped to save themselves from their onslaught. They need a hero, of course!

But that's just scratching the surface! Humankind, perhaps fearing a repeat of the nuclear armageddon, has cast science and technology aside in favor of pursuing the study of magic instead. A floating Tower placed high in the sky keeps a watchful eye on the world below, armed with an arsenal of weapons meant to keep the peace among the surviving population. And a sinister foe named Draygon is trying to claim the power of the Tower for himself in order to unleash his own second End Day!

Crystalis presented a lot of complexity in its story, as well as in its gameplay, and it actually caught Nintendo's eye years ago – the Big N got the rights to re-release it as a Game Boy Color game! These days you can play it on Switch via the NES lineup available to NSO subscribers. **– LUCAS**



ENERGY INSUFFICIENCY

MEGA MAN LEGENDS

IN A WORLD covered by endless water – wait, what? The Wind Waker is going to cover that? Doggone it.

That's fine, there's plenty more here to discuss than the sudden increase in affordable beachfront property. For instance, there's the whole energy crisis. Well, "crisis" might seem like an overstatement, given how people are able to live their lives some thousands of years after the age of Reploids, but it is an ongoing concern. The Holon Machinery society runs on is powered by the energy created from Quantum Refractors, which can be found inside the many ruins dotting the planet's surface.

Unfortunately, these Refractors are often guarded by the ruins' resident Reaverbots, and so licensed Diggers (such as series protagonist MegaMan Volnutt and his Spotter, Roll Caskett) often take on the job of making their way through the Reaverbots and claiming what treasures lie within.

Society can keep on running as long as Diggers can keep finding more Refractors, but there is a fear that the supply will eventually run out. Legends have spread that there exists a "Mother Lode," a treasure which could provide limitless energy to the world and make whoever finds it rich beyond their wildest dreams. However, the truth – at least, that which some Diggers seek – is a far darker, more destructive secret.

But how did the world wind up in such a state? That is a mystery which has yet to be answered. Some believe it to have been the result of the endless wars of the past, such as those between the Mega Men seen in the Mega Man ZX series. Others believe it to be a result of environmental impact, such as when the space colony Eurasia crashed down in 21XX during Mega Man X5. Maybe it was a combination of those things, or perhaps there was some other catalyst. After all, it was a very, very long time ago . . . so what's a century or two between potentially cataclysmic events by that point, right?

While this Digger's Adventure Story takes place in Halcyon days, the happiness may not be to last. By the end of the series, the Elder System has started to reactivate. After two decades without a follow-up, will we get to see how this turns out for the people of this far-flung future? Perhaps only the Mega Buster on Volnutt's hand knows for sure. **– DAVID**

THE WORLD OF RUIN

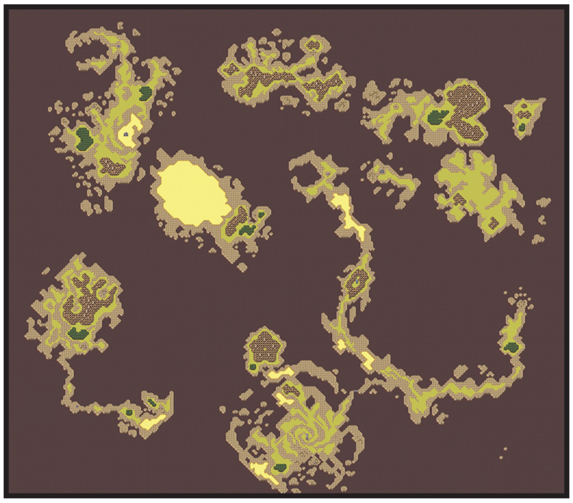
FINAL FANTASY VI

NARRATIVES THAT INVOLVE apocalyptic scenarios typically approach the concept in one of two ways: either our protagonists must thwart doomsday, or they must survive a world that has long since been brought to collapse. Very rare, however, is a tale that presents the "before" and "after" in equal amounts. Such is the nihilistic case of Final Fantasy VI.

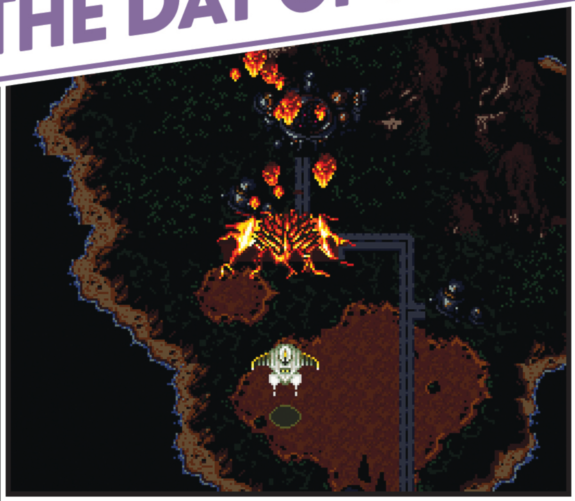
Players spend hours endearing themselves to the plight of the Returners as they push back against the Gestahlian Empire's nefarious campaign to conquer the world via weaponized Esper magic. You build a bizarre team that includes a feral child, a girl who can paint monsters into existence and even a dancing Moogle. A general who defects from the Empire impersonates an opera singer as a purple octopus creature tries to drop a curtain weight on her head. Heck, the martial artist of your team successively suplexes a flippin' ghost train!

But then Kefka, a loopy court mage in jester makeup, absorbs the power of the gods of magic before going all Emperor Joker and razing the planet for kicks and giggles. Untold life: lost. The once lush landscape: shattered and withered. Your tight-knit party: scattered to the four corners of whatever dirt mounds remain. A year passes in this transformed World of Ruin, and those who haven't succumbed to despair only endure by grasping onto whatever small pleasures remain unspoiled.

It's most impressive how Final Fantasy VI is able to craft this rich, vibrant environment and then shatter it beyond recognition, a demonstration of the indiscriminate cruelty of chaos that can extinguish joy and happiness without warning. Even after our far-flung friends reunite to avenge the fallen and knock the mad clown off his godhood perch, the world remains a broken mess – although a glimmer of hope for the future does barely manage to peek through the cracks. **– TONY**



THE DAY OF LAVOS



CHRONO TRIGGER

LIFE IS GREAT when you're a teenaged boy who sleeps in every day and gets to attend fairs with your friends – until you get zapped back and forth in time and discover the end of the world!

This apocalypse situation stems from an extra-spiky interstellar beaked pinecone alien named Lavos. Just like any good final boss, Lavos has three forms: the aforementioned pinecone, a giant humanoid monster hooked up to tubing and finally the Lavos Core, which is a humanoid alien accompanied by floating . . . eggplants?

Alien anatomy aside, the parasitic baddie lands on Earth around 65,000,000 B.C. and begins sucking power out of the planet. Over the course of millions of years the lousy leech siphons off enough energy to finally unleash its Lavos Spawn, which are meant to find other planets and repeat the cycle. This event takes place in 1999 A.D. (a popular year for end-of-the-world stories), but due to several time-travel shenanigans and evil villains, Lavos can also awaken in 12,000 B.C. or 600 A.D. There are several ways to stop the beast, but in order to save the planet from becoming a futuristic wasteland where life is hanging on by a thread, it's sleepy teenaged boy Crono's fate to be the one to defeat it.

With Marle and Lucca from his own time and more companions recruited from other eras (Robo from the future, Ayla from the distant past and Frog and Magus, both from the middle ages), Crono mounts an assault on Lavos and prevents the apocalypse from ever happening. In one instance they crash their time machine – the Epoch – straight into its stupid beaked face, eliminating a third of the battle but stranding them at the Day of Lavos. There's also another way to attack Lavos at the very beginning of the game using New Game+! Regardless, all roads and timelines lead to the great alien pinecone and the epic battle to save the world. **– BRETT**

Try Not to Breathe

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

IN WHAT IS unfortunately one of the most immediately relatable end-of-the-world scenarios on this list, Square Enix's Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles presented players with a planet where the very air was unsafe to breathe.

A fog has enveloped the world. A sinister, magical, poisonous gas cloud called the Miasma – it's pervasive, ever-present and lingering over every bit of land and sea there is. No wind can blow it away. No countermagic can dispel it. So all of the sentient beings remaining with breath still in their lungs have been forced into tiny, protected pockets of territory. The whole population of the planet is living in little, isolated communities with small bubbles of safe, breathable air surrounding them.

That minute measure of safety and security is fleeting, though. Each of the handful of remaining towns has a magical crystal that wards off the Miasma – but doing so slowly corrupts the crystal over time. Therefore, it's up to an intrepid team of adventurers to venture out into the wilderness – braving the Miasma – to seek out magical Myrrh trees. One droplet of Myrrh is produced every two years, and that droplet must be collected and transported safely back to the village to purify the town's crystal and keep it in working order. And if the adventurers were to fail in this quest? Well, everyone back home would simply suffocate.

This oppressively stressful scenario was seemingly concocted by Square Enix in order to give story context to the game's key gameplay mechanic: keeping the party close together. Crystal Chronicles was built as a four-hero multiplayer experience. In that kind of game design, if left unrestricted, the players could scatter out to four different corners of the game map, causing all kinds of problems for the camera trying to keep them all in view at the same time.

So the developers forced the heroes to carry a crystal along with them everywhere they went. The portable crystal (or "bucket" as I and my college friends used to call it) projects a circular safe zone of breathable air amidst the Miasma. Straying outside that zone caused your character to take poison damage as they struggled to breathe the noxious fumes, and you wouldn't last very long if you tried to go too far!

It's an interesting example of an apocalypse scenario being created in service of a game's core gameplay, rather than being something that exists independently and unconnected to the players' experience. **– LUCAS**

Zombies Attack!

TELLTALE GAMES' THE WALKING DEAD

APOCALYPTIC SETTINGS AND zombies go together like Zombieland's Tallahassee and Twinkies, so it's no surprise that a series with the combo claims a spot on our list!

The Walking Dead franchise, which spawned from a comic book series by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore, has made its mark on many forms of media, and most notably in the video game space via Telltale Games. Their take on The Walking Dead debuted in 2012. The series included episodic adventure games based in this universe, featuring a world devastated due to a pathogen that turned people into zombies (a.k.a. walkers) and the harsh actions the remaining humans take in order to survive.

Throughout the games, you take on the roles of survivors including Lee Everett, Clementine and others, complete timed puzzles, navigate through branching dialogue and make decisions that direct your path forward. What makes Telltale Games' portrayal of this apocalyptic setting special is that the player has agency in these stories and must make decisions that impact the fates of the characters and the course of the story. Do you prioritize your own life over someone else's? Who do you save? Who do you leave behind? Do you choose to share or hoard your resources?

These are just a few questions you're presented with while playing these games. They aren't easy, especially because the writing makes you care about the characters you come across. When I played them, I agonized over what to do because I wanted so much for Lee and Clementine to make it!

Telltale's Walking Dead doesn't just drop you into an apocalypse – it gives you a role and makes you shape it, for better or for worse. **– MAGGIE**

THE MOON IS FALLING

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

A LOOMING LUNAR landing of world-ending proportions hangs over the land, and there's not much you can do to stop it. So what's a boy to do with three days until complete global annihilation? What are the best ways to use the last 72 hours of your time on this planet? For Young Link, the answers are simple: dress up in fun costumes, explore the world and help people.

This clash of innocent altruism against a backdrop of pre-apocalypse tension makes Majora's Mask more humbly horrific than anything else in the Zelda series. In Wind Waker we see a waterlogged, post-apocalyptic world, but it's actually pretty pleasant! Majora's is downright dreadful in comparison. It's got a low frequency buzz of anxiety that's always humming. What's worse, none of the adults in Termina (the aptly named nation where the game takes place) seem to hear it! A sneering death orb looks down on them at all times, and yet most Terminans are more than content to bleat "Don't look up!" as they go about their daily routines, writing off any "alarmists" as know-nothing scrubs. Link quickly learns that the only thing more dangerous than a cosmic cataclysm is an apathetic populace.

He also learns, through trial and error, that the best cure for apathy is empathy. Through a mix of charity, curiosity and light cultural appropriation, he connects to Termina's wild spectrum of societies. He's a green and brown plant boy one minute, a blue-skinned, black-eyed fish man the next. He joins a gang of child activists, plays electric guitar deep beneath the ocean, unites star-crossed lovers in the dark of night and rescues cows from invading UFOs. He carries these stories with him forever, symbolized by the masks on his inventory screen. Bringing them all together summons a Fierce Deity, the ultimate "Adult Link" and the culmination of all the friendship, hardship and swordsmanship he's experienced along the way.

Then, just like that, it's all gone. The moon is cast away, a haunted child finds peace and a new day dawns. But what about Termina? Can we ever go back, or has Hyrule pushed it aside for good, like a dream you can never quite remember? **— JONATHAN**

HYRULE IS FLOODED

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

WHO SAYS THE apocalypse has to be the end of the world? At first glance, it's not immediately obvious that The Wind Waker takes place in a post-apocalyptic world, because it's one of the most beautiful, lively and seemingly peaceful iterations of Hyrule we've ever seen.

Under the surface, though, lies the remains of a whole other version of Hyrule that met a rather grim end. Sometime after the events of Ocarina of Time, Ganondorf escaped his imprisonment and threatened to wreak havoc on the world, but when it came time for a legendary hero to show up and take care of business, Link was nowhere to be found. Without a champion to save the day, the people of Hyrule turned to the gods themselves for help. In typical godly fashion, their answer was to basically hit a gigantic reset button on the world by decimating everything with a massive flood.

As a result, what once were the tallest peaks in Hyrule were now the islands of the Great Sea. Some remnants of the old days — like the Great Deku Tree — found ways to endure, while new deities like the sky spirit dragon Valoo filled this new world with wonder. The surviving Hylian people built new villages and ships to explore the seas. The wood-dwelling Kokiri people transformed into the adorable Koroks to spread seeds across the ocean in hopes of growing new forests. The aquatic Zora people evolved into the Rito tribe, taking on more bird-like qualities to travel the skies. And the Gorons . . . well, they just kept on being Gorons.

In a strange twist, Ganondorf's nefarious plan was actually to undo the apocalypse in order to save the drowned world he hails from. Of course, he only wanted to do that so he could then create his own apocalypse that would be way worse than what the gods hit Hyrule with in the first place, so in effect Link's quest was to prevent one apocalypse by saving another! He set out on this journey by setting sail, exploring the sea with the help of a talking boat (who happened to have a key connection to the old kingdom).

The Wind Waker may hide some dark secrets and presumably a whole lot of death, but aside from the giant squids, obnoxious bird creatures and that horrible Tingle having his own island for some reason, this apocalypse isn't half bad. **— KRIS**

PLANET-WIDE FAMINE

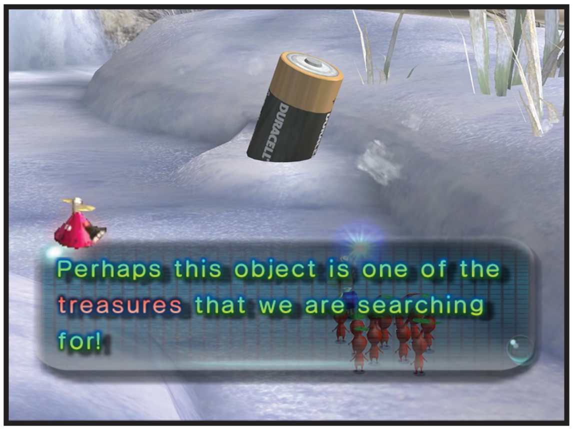
THE PIKMIN SERIES

KIRBY'S NEW ADVENTURE exploring the abandoned ruins of the Forgotten Land may end up becoming Nintendo's most colorful depiction of an apocalypse, but it will have to overcome this contender if it wants to take that crown!

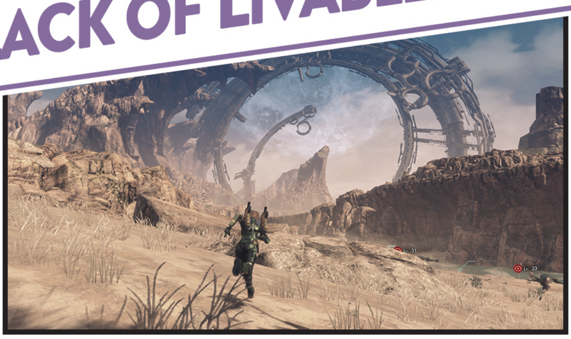
The Pikmin series actually presents a pair of planets that both qualify for inclusion on this list: one post-apocalyptic and another on the brink of total collapse. Let's begin with the latter! Pikmin 3 introduced us to the world of Koppai, a planet packed so full of hungry people that they've managed to deplete their entire global food supply. Seeking salvation amongst the stars, a trio of Koppai's best and brightest take off into space to try to find another world out there somewhere that might still have food available.

The team succeeds, crash-landing on the original Pikmin series planet, which they name PNF-404. The games present this world as a future Earth, though – one in which humankind has apparently died out or disappeared. All that remains are relics of human civilization, like product-placement Duracell batteries! Captain Olimar's quest in Pikmin 2 was monetarily motivated, as he and his assistant Louie explored the wasteland that was once our world to collect these artifacts and take them home to their world, Hocotate, as treasures to sell to keep their freight company in business.

It's good to know that, even if Earth as we know it ends, it will still be able to support the continued existence of two different alien species! **– LUCAS**



LACK OF LIVABLE LAND



THE XENOBLADE SERIES

THE PEOPLE'S PERIL in the Xenoblade series basically comes down to not having stable living space. This doesn't come from overpopulation or something man-made, but from the fact that everyone lives on top of other living things!

In the first Xenoblade Chronicles, Shulk and his friends start in Colony 9. It's explained that they live on a nearly unfathomably large titan known as the Bionis. The Bionis is frozen in place, locked in eternal combat with an equally massive titan named the Mechonis. Though frozen, the war rages on without the titans as Mechons from Mechonis and Homs from the Bionis battle constantly. Everyone is unaware of why the war continues, but both believe winning is essential to their survival. Several races, including the Nopons, High Entia, Homs, Telethia and Machina fight for their homelands and all have their role in the story. It turns out it's far more complicated, of course, and Shulk must face gods in order to retain his way of life!

While Xenoblade Chronicles X contains no known connection to the main series, it still holds its own apocalypse. Humanity is faced with leaving Earth as it is destroyed during a war between two alien factions. Humans construct arks to leave Earth, with one known as the White Whale eventually crash-landing on a planet called Mira. Here, humanity somehow transfers our consciousnesses to robot bodies called Mimeosomes. The Ganglion, who attacked the ark and are trying to destroy humanity, are trying to find the Lifehold that got separated from the ark. This Lifehold contains the colonists, but is actually just our memories and consciousnesses, as all of our corporeal bodies were destroyed along with Earth! Humanity's situation is certainly grim in this one, and the player must fight for humanity's continued existence. As a member of BLADE, your customizable avatar fights to protect the Lifehold and humanity's last hope.

In Xenoblade Chronicles 2, people live atop titans once again, but the titans float in a giant Cloud Sea and are comparatively smaller than the titans in the first adventure. Salvagers can dive into the sea to recover lost resources, and that's what we see the main character Rex doing as the tale begins. To make things worse, the titans are dying, and they simply sink into the sea when they die. This leads to a serious shortage of land, with refugees having to scramble to find living space on other titans at a moment's notice. People have developed ships and things that can travel from titan to titan, but the ships cannot sustain cities like the titans can. Rex and his party fight to save the remaining lands and end conflicts. Rex becomes a Driver, meaning he can wield a weapon that has a mind – and a body – of its own. This is where Pyra and Mythra step in, as they are legendary Blades that have the power to kill titans. As humanity tends to do, wars and other conflicts can lead to the premature deaths of titans, as the prequel story Torna ~ The Golden Country illustrates. This is why Rex tries to keep history from repeating itself by fighting for peace! **– BRETT**

DINOSAURS AT WAR

PRIMAL RAGE

PRIMAL RAGE SPEAKS to that universal sentiment of "If we're all going to be destroyed, I want it to be in the sweetest manner possible!"

Picture this: You're walking along, going about your own business, when suddenly hundreds of meteors slam directly into the planet and seven prehistoric beast-gods arise in the cataclysms, ravaging the land in the most radical explosion you've ever witnessed. Awesome, right? The humans of Primal Rage clearly think so, as they immediately – and I mean immediately – give in and embrace their new reality. Technology may be decimated, cities may lie in ruin, but good old homo sapiens around the world instantly take the opportunity to don some fluorescent caveman pelts and support the 50-foot-tall paleo-monster of their choice. The people even cheer if one of their own gets caught up in the gods' crossfire, because they know this is by far the most radical way for the planet's story to end.

Speaking of the planet, it is no longer Earth, but "Urth," a brutal world where all traces of modern civilization have been reclaimed by nature. It's unclear which magical dinosaur decided on the new spelling, but regardless it takes guts to survive in this place. All continents have shifted into the shape of a fire-breathing T-rex skull, with each territory representing a wildly different biome under the dominion of a prehistoric creature. However, every god would rather control the entire planet, and so their destructive wars will continue until one is crowned the victor.

On the bright side, this apocalypse gives you a choice of which violent stop-motion beast to follow! Are you a fan of food? Well then stick with Sauron, the God of Hunger! Sure, this T-rex has to devour human flesh to remain immortal, and sure, *you* count as "human flesh," but at least he'll theoretically keep your family fed in some vague nonspecific way!

Do you want to stay alive? Then align yourself with Talon, the God of Survival! He's a fleet-footed raptor who wants to keep humans in pens and let his fellow raptors hunt them for sport.

If that doesn't work for you, go with Chaos, the ape who – actually no, don't do that. Chaos is so full of '90s gross-out jokes that parents campaigned to get Primal Rage removed from store shelves back in the day. Best not to relive that.

If the world's going to go out, it might as well go out in style . . . GIANT MURDEROUS DINOSAUR STYLE!! **– LINDSEY**

THE DESERT OF DA'AT

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

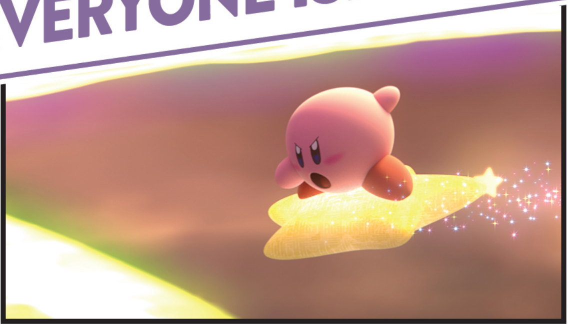
TOKYO IS A common setting in Atlus' popular Shin Megami Tensei games – albeit "parallel" versions of Tokyo that are all kinds of messed up. 2021's Shin Megami Tensei V follows the same story thread: Human stagnation and bad blood between demons and angels results in Tokyo being crumpled up and thrown into the bin once again. The world must be reborn, and you play a key role in deciding who takes the reins.

But before you're called upon to make that vital decision, you must wander Shin Megami Tensei V's wasted world in search of understanding. This alternate Tokyo is called Da'at – a Hebrew word that references the acknowledgement of one's own will and being. Da'at supports several ecosystems, but wherever you look, you see society's ruin. Rusting cars. Sand-scoured train tracks. Crumbling buildings that ping-pong the cackles of hostile demons. If the dead, empty setting for Kazuo Umezu horror manga "The Drifting Classroom" gives you chills, you'll want to grab a sweater.

The demons struggling to survive at the bottom tell you it's been a long time since humans lived in their iteration of Tokyo. Armageddon happened in the blink of an eye, and when it was done, humans vanished. When you first set foot in Da'at, it certainly gives off the unsettling air you'd expect from a place devoid of mortal influence. The opening moments of your first visit see you trudge across an empty, sandy plain where mysterious columns stretch up into eternity.

Is Da'at doomed to remain a ruin-pocked nest of demons forever? That's up to you. SMTV ultimately hands you the keys to the future. Are humans more likely to thrive in a peaceful world of strict order? Or are we better off with the deeply flawed freedoms chaos affords? Whatever your answer, you'll have to trudge through the eerie world of Da'at to find it. **– NADIA**

EVERYONE ISN'T HERE



SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE

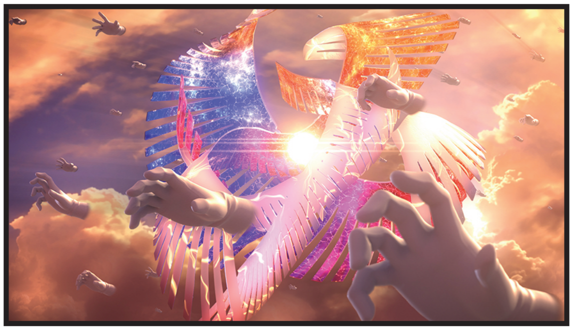
FINALLY, WE'LL END as we began, as the scene seen back on Page 33 was pulled straight out of the latest installment in the Super Smash series. It's an oddly lonely moment for a brand built on cramming as many different fighters onto the screen as possible, as often as possible . . . but that's because Kirby is the only hero who's left alive at that point!

Yes, Nintendo shocked us all by opening Ultimate with an apocalypse that zapped nearly every one of their notable mascot characters out of existence! Galeem – a sinister orb of light wrapped in angel wings – used a devastating attack that blasted huge, weaving strands of energy toward a whole array of heroes who'd assembled to oppose him. Every hero struck by one of these beams was instantly vaporized! One by one we watched as all our childhood favorites met their ends, none of them able to escape the total annihilation.

. . . Well, none of them except Kirby. As the final remaining hero, the powerful puffball fled atop his trusty Warp Star. And actually managed to evade the death rays! Exhausted, he crashed a safe distance away – then opened his eyes to behold the wasteland of the World of Light.

All of this was a setup for Ultimate's single-player story mode, in which players were tasked to take command of the Kirbster and rescue the lost heroes one at a time (which also unlocked access to them as playable allies and in multiplayer mode). It was jaw-dropping, compelling and personally motivated me to make my way through the World of Light as fast as I could. I had to become Kirby, the savior of all of Smash!

After all that, surely he can handle the Forgotten Land, right? **– LUCAS**



And there you have it: our unlucky 13 choices for most impactful video game apocalypses. Hopefully reviewing this list has awarded you some insight, so that you'll know just what to do the next time a world-ending alien erupts from its slumber under the Earth, or a hungry horde of zombies comes knocking at your door. And if you're still too overwhelmed? Just call Kirby for a little assistance!

9-VOLT in... "N Summary"

BY MATTHEW TARANTO

KIRBY AND THE FORGOTTEN LAND

We're not in Dream Land any more!

ALL THE WAY back in the 244th issue of Nintendo Power magazine (August 2009, for those keeping track – we're not *quite* that far along in Warp Zone yet), Casey Loe took us on a trip through the world of a game called Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon, which takes place in the empty ruins of what was once known as Tokyo.

The article was eye-opening for me – particularly a sidebar called "Real Ruins of Modern Day Japan." It explained that "a journey through mysteriously abandoned amusement parks, hotels and public schools may sound like a post-apocalyptic fantasy, but in Japan, such modern-day ruins aren't hard to find." It went on to reveal that touring and photographing these abandoned places has become something of a niche hobby in Japan, with ruin-themed guidebooks and photo collections available to those interested in bookstores across the nation, and searches for "haikyo" (ruins) providing further documentation online through blogs and photo sites.

Fascination turned to hobby as I learned that the commonality of such places is far from unique to Japan. In fact, the diminishing popularity of shopping malls in the United States has led to several "dead mall" sites, videos and communities cropping up in the years since that article was written. Maybe even before. Thanks to YouTubers such as Adam the Woo, Dan Bell, Nation Decay, Defunctland and Bright Sun Films, among others, it's become a fascinating pastime to see these places where people have worked and played, shopped and celebrated, and just generally created memories as they've lived their lives – places all but forgotten thanks to the ravages of time (and usually a lot of money, contracts and planning for revitalizations falling through).

Despite my growing interest in the subject over the last decade, I've yet to have a chance to play Fragile Dreams, nor to get to check this kind of thing out first-hand for myself. But with a certain announcement made during the September 23 Nintendo Direct, a new opportunity has arisen – and in a most unexpected way, at that!

After the trademark Switch snap accompanying the system's logo, we were shown what appeared to be a movie theater overgrown with plant life, the inside of a shopping mall with grass growing under what appears to be a collapsed ceiling (with birds gathered atop the debris) and a bridge leading into a downtown sector featuring towers with flowers and trees erupting from various openings. Its beauty was only mitigated by the lack of any music or sound, other than white noise rumbling over it all.

As that noise faded out, we were treated to the sound of waves crashing as the camera faded from a view of some palm trees to reveal . . . Kirby!

When our tough creampuff woke up, he saw a jungle stretching out before him, and we soon saw him running through it – away from the player, in full 3D! That's right, while Kirby has dabbled in the third dimension on a few occasions, this will be his first fully 3D platforming adventure, as he explores the eponymous "Forgotten Land."

Soon, Kirby was running through some of the abandoned areas we had seen just moments ago, an adventurous tune accompanying him on his journey. We saw him encounter some sort of fox/canine-like creatures within the mall, run along a broken roadway,

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY
RELEASE: MARCH 25, 2022 RATING: E10+

seemingly lead some yellow birds through the dangers of an amusement park and fight a large gorilla-like boss named Gorimondo.

Not everything is new and unfamiliar, though. Kirby also rode atop his Warp Star, rescued some Waddle Dees from a cage and gained some familiar powers.

That first look managed to tickle that haikyo itch, but also toned down the sense of foreboding creepiness that can often be inherent in indulging it. Since that initial reveal, more info has come to light through further trailers, along with updates on the official website and the like. While the North American website gives no name to the place Kirby has found himself in, the Japanese version calls it the "New World," a place where nature and civilization are fused.

One thought that has surely crossed a few minds is how similar so much of this looks to our world, Earth. This begs the question: Does Kirby and the Forgotten Land take place on a post-apocalyptic Earth, à la Pikmin or Splatoon (or heck, even some versions of Sonic the Hedgehog)?

What makes this question all the more intriguing is this is not Kirby's first run-in with a world resembling a post-apocalyptic Earth. In Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards, there was also a very similar planet which had buildings and factories that had long since been abandoned; however, as the world's name implies, the circumstances are very different from what we see here, as Shiver Star was a planet completely frozen over. Could something have happened, and Kirby's found himself back on Shiver Star under more favorable climate conditions? Or is there more to this mystery than that?

Whatever answers may come will no doubt only be found as Kirby explores this new land/world. But while this marks Kirby's first big foray into 3D adventuring, it appears that it won't be an open-world or Mario sandbox-styled adventure, as you'll still have to make your way safely to the goal at the end of each stage – you're just going to have a few more degrees of freedom in figuring out how you'll get there.

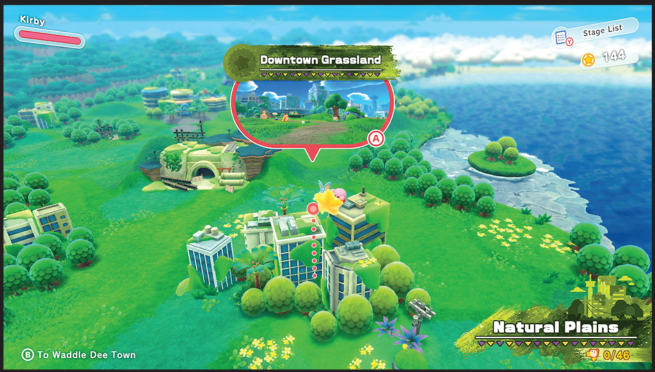
Supporting this is our first view of the map, which shows the various settings occupying it in a fashion not entirely unlike Super Mario 3D World, but a bit different as well. That is, we only see Kirby flying on his Warp Star over the various regions, rather than wandering the map on foot (and living the dream some of us had ever since first laying eyes on Super Mario World in old video game magazines).

Each set of levels – or "world," if you prefer – seems to be separated, sitting apart on the map in distinct locations, rather than interwoven. Several main areas and side areas are shown, with some of the latter possibly revealed by discovering hidden exits in the former.

The settings vary in the ways you've come to expect from your typical video game fare – your jungles, your bridges, your ice levels, your deserts (not *desserts*, Kirby – that comes later), and so forth, but all are unified in the grander haikyo theme. For instance, there is the aforementioned shopping mall that's been grown over by various plants, a similarly overgrown amusement park and even a parking garage lit only by strings of decorative lights leading to the formerly festive fair. An enormous bridge designed more for vast quantities of traffic than steadfast adventurers is covered in snow and enshrouded in fog. Even the customary desert level looks as though its dry sands may have overtaken some sort of hotel or tropical resort.

But perhaps the most notable area of all is what's known as Waddle Dee Town, which will act as the central hub for this new adventure. An aggressive group of animals who've named themselves the "Beast Pack" seem to have had the run of things, leaving this area mostly (if not entirely) uninhabited. And these same unfriendly creatures seem to have taken to locking up Waddle Dees in cages of varying number. Sometimes one, sometimes three and maybe even more of them are waiting helplessly for a rescue inside a cage found at the end of each level. It seems that seeking out hidden exits may also yield hidden Waddle Dees as well.

Fortunately, not every Waddle Dee is helpless! As has been the trend for a while now, Bandana Waddle Dee is back to help Kirby on his adventure when you pass a Joy-Con to a friend. Bandana Waddle Dee comes toting his trademark spear, which can be thrown at enemies using an arching targeting reticle. And while he can't float through the air with a puff of his cheeks like Kirby, he can spin his



KIRBY'S NEW COMPANION!

ELFILIN

No, Elfilin isn't some sort of prescription medication from Middle-earth, but rather the name of a new ally who joins Kirby on his quest through the Forgotten Land! Little is known about this chinchilla-esque creature, except that it has a pair of ear-like wings (or would that be wing-like ears?) that would no doubt earn the respect of She-Ra's friend Kowl. (Kids, ask your parents if you're only familiar with Princesses of Power on Netflix). Kirby's always making new buddies . . . though some don't always turn out to be so good, leading some long-running Kirby series fans to have already cast a suspicious eye toward this new ally. Still, even some of the most mischievous among Kirby's rogues have come around to the side of good in the end, so we'll just have to see! Play through Kirby and the Forgotten Land to see if Elfilin is right for you.

polearm like a propeller to hover around in the air — while raining down smaller spears on foes from above!

As you rescue Waddle Dees, the town starts to fill out, with shops opening and other things happening as it's restored. While all the details have yet to be revealed (with some of those we do know being only vague at best), we have spotted a few intriguing sights that have piqued our interest.

One such peek is of a shop with a hat and scroll on its sign. Known as Waddle Dee's Weapons Shop, this is a location where you can take Kirby's Copy Abilities and evolve them into new, more powerful forms with more evolved, cooler looks to reflect them.

For instance, the razor-crested helmet of the Cutter power can be evolved into a new form with twin crests, and rather than hurl a single blade, the new Chakram Cutter helmet adds a pair of wings and two razor-edged rings that will allow Kirby to channel his inner Xena. Fire Kirby's flamethrower becomes a spewing stream of fiery volcanic rock with the Volcano Fire upgrade, then it can evolve further into the wicked Dragon Fire. Needle, Hammer, Sword . . . all the classics can be powered up here.

Another area of interest is a theater that presumably shows videos of some kind. Cutscenes? Original animations? Right Back At Ya episodes? There's also a gachapon machine where you can get figures of the game's characters (probably easier than getting certain amiibo), a post office (for some online element, maybe?) and a coliseum where you can challenge the likes of the mighty Meta Knight before a Waddle Dee audience.

Elsewhere in Waddle Dee Town, there sits Wise Waddle Dee, who not only provides some helpful hints for Kirby on his travels, but also tracks the scores uploaded to an online leaderboard for games. He also lets you know which Copy Ability has been used the most that day when you check in with him!

Among the more interesting locations in Waddle Dee Town (personally speaking) is the Waddle Dee Café, where Kirby is able to get a side job serving up food to Waddle Dee customers (hey, it's a gig economy, and being a hero doesn't always pay the bills . . . especially if your grocery bill looks like Kirby's). Maxim Tomatoes and Energy Drinks are shown to be the order of the day as you aim for the high score in this minigame, though much like Kirby's waistline, the menu likely expands more as the game progresses, making lunch orders more complicated over time. Incidentally, this whole bit reminds me of The Misadventures of Tron Bonne's café minigame ("Curry rice!").

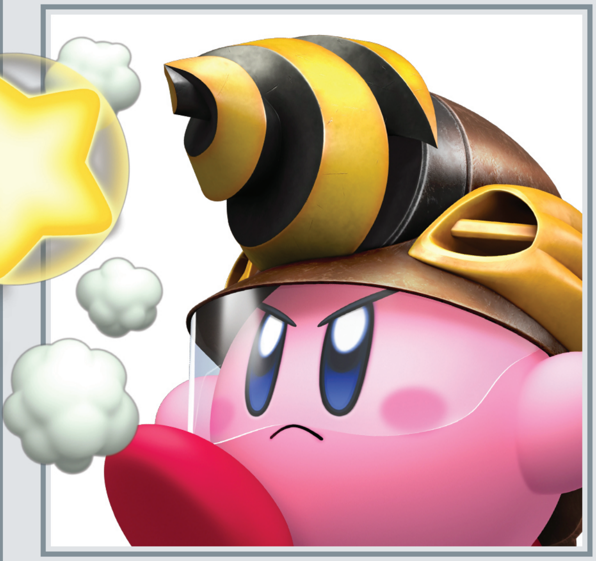
Fun Fact: The Waddle Dee Café is actually based on the Kirby Café, a real-world dining establishment that is themed around the Kirby franchise. What's more, Kirby and his friends can even order Kirby Burgers here, just like the ones served in the real version (albeit a little less pink)!

Of course, when it's time for a break, Kirby and Bandana Waddle Dee can partake in the favorite pastime of video game heroes far and wide — fishing! Kirby dons a fishing hat as both can take up poles and see what they can catch. (Whether this is another minigame or just a means of relaxing is as yet unknown.)

One other bit of interest involving the Waddle Dees was teased via a bit of artwork on the official Japanese Kirby Twitter account. Several seem to have formed what is described in translation as a "Waddle Dee Report Corps," who seem to want to interview their heroic pink champion, but they

HE'S GOT A GUN!
RANGER KIRBY

Hmm, I can't decide whether "Be vewy, vewy quiet – Kirby's hunting Beast Pack! Huhuhuhuhuh . . . " or "Go! Go! Kirby Rangers!" is the better opener for this power . . . so I'll just use both! That said, the power Kirby gets from inhaling one of the pith helmet-sporting doggos wandering the Forgotten Land is definitely more reminiscent of Elmer Fudd than Tommy Oliver, but I digress. Consuming one of those pistol-packing pups grants Kirby some jungle-hunting headgear of his own, and a powerful pistol that packs a punch! While the hounds fire rounds that look like cannonballs, the heat Ranger Kirby is packing is chock-full of star power! You can even give it a Mega Man-like boost by charging up before releasing your shots, or strafe enemies from the sky with a sweeping barrage fired down at unsuspecting foes from the air.



YOU GOTTA DIG DEEP!
DRILL KIRBY

You know the drill: When Kirby inhales certain enemies, he can take on their power and use their abilities as his own. Some of the more interesting creatures that allow this ingestion-fueled infusion of force are the members of the Beast Pack who resemble mole-like creatures, but with drills for noses! When Kirby chows down on one of these dirt-diving delinquents, he becomes Drill Kirby, decked out in a mining helmet with a drill attached to the front for digging, and even a handy protective visor! With this new power, he can dig beneath the surface to find buried treasures – such as Red Star Rings – hidden within glowing patches of dirt. He can also encircle an enemy, causing the ground to erupt beneath them with tremendous force! According to Nintendo's Twitter, "Kirby's drill will pierce the heavens!" Wait, that sounds familiar . . .

have run afoul of the Beast Pack along the way. Could this group of Waddle Dees effectively be Kirby's analogous answer to the Toad Brigade from more recent Mario games – a group of non-kidnapped Dees who pop up in action scenes from time to time? Whether or not they appear in the actual game remains unknown at this point, but while it seems likely, it could just as easily be some promotional art made in the name of fun.

Speaking of the Beast Pack, we can see that many of them are new foes of Kirby who seem to be based more on different animals than some of the baddies Kirby has dealt with before.

One instance sees a large black crocodile swimming the waters of a river – no doubt in search of pink, marshmallowy goodness. Another from Trailer #1 showed Gorimondo, the giant gorilla-like goon, crashing his fist right through a window to pull a surprised Kirby right out of the room and into his boss battle arena. A fierce feline fighter named Clawroline will attempt to slice Kirby into ribbons in the midst of what appears to be an abandoned circus tent, and a seriously silly-looking armadillo actually named Sillydillo will try to squash our hero by rolling up into a boulder-sized ball and bowling around his boss lair.

Lower-ranking Beast Pack recruits seem to include giant snakes and moles, and of course, there are the ever-present dog-like enemies roaming the land, hunting down Waddle Dees. Some familiar Kirby series foes show up, too, though some are in new forms. Shotzo, Poppy Bros. Jr. and Scarfy, among others, all make their return, as does Wispy Woods – or rather, what seems to be a relative, "Tropic Woods," who sends roots all over the battlefield in an effort to clobber that there Kirby.

Naturally, new enemies means new Copy Abilities! We've seen a couple so far (see above), but there may yet be more new kinds of hats for Kirby to wear even beyond those *and* all the new boosted forms of the classics on sale in the Weapons Shop! Gathering together all the different powers and all their various upgraded forms, it's more than likely that this game will have more Copy Abilities available than any past Kirby adventure!

. . . And then there's a whole other kind of power for Kirby to claim in this game too! Nintendo held back from revealing it at first, but the most recent Nintendo Direct has finally pulled back the curtain and given us something further to chew on – more than a mouthful, in fact!

The newly revealed Mouthful Mode shows Kirby biting off more than he can chew, but not more than he can use. While Kirby normally takes on the appearance of things he swallows, it turns out that things work a little differently when he *can't* swallow the item in question. Instead, it's more like the items take on a more Kirby-like appearance . . . in as much as Kirby is effectively draped over them like a protective cover on a car.

In fact, the first such example of Kirby utilizing his newfound ability just so happens to demonstrate what happens when he attempts to suck up a dilapidated automobile! Kirby can't swallow it, but he can control it! The result is a form known as "Car Mouth," which allows Kirby to use its wheels to drive around as though he just rolled off the lot. (So not only can Kirby "Maximize" with some of the beasts, but he can "roll out," too! It's like he's his own unique kind of Transformer!) Put the pedal to the metal to run down any foes who don't obey proper traffic safety rules, such as "stay off the sidewalk!"

Cars aren't the only thing Kirby can fail to fully inhale, though. Sucking up a vending machine might not end up providing him with the mouth full of flavors and various treats he initially thought, but the rectangular form of Vending Mouth lets him spew forth unopened juice cans from his mouth/slot at any Beast Pack pests who cross his path as he waddles about. (Kids, don't try this at home. Or at least empty the cans first!). If you find a garage door that's seen better days, pelting it with enough cans might just let you break on through to the other side!

Another ability is Cone Mouth, in which he sucks up an orange traffic cone. While these portable roadside barricades aren't especially sharp, in Kirby's hands – er, mouth – he can nevertheless flip upside down and shatter crates, fissures in the ground and cracked pipes to unleash a geyser of flowing water, lifting him to new heights! Guess it just goes to show that Kirby can come up with a pointed response to any situation!

With Scissor-Lift Mouth (which really sounds more like something Kirby should get checked out at a dentist), Kirby can cruise around with a scissor-lift and use its titular trait to elevate himself to otherwise inaccessible ledges. Incidentally, this does leave us to wonder about Kirby's normal floating ability – or lack thereof – in this world.

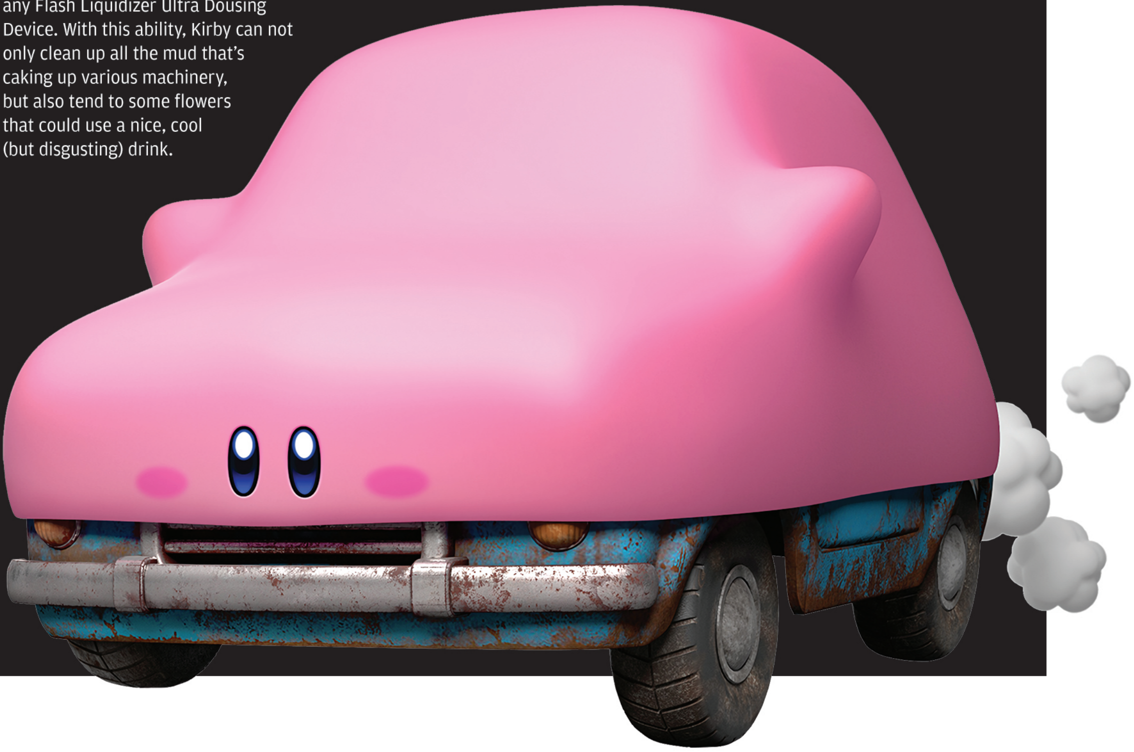
Then there's Water-Balloon Mouth, which doesn't involve inhaling a water balloon, but rather enough water for Kirby to fill himself up like one, letting him spew streams of water as well as any Flash Liquidizer Ultra Dousing Device. With this ability, Kirby can not only clean up all the mud that's caking up various machinery, but also tend to some flowers that could use a nice, cool (but disgusting) drink.

Other abilities include Ring Mouth, which sees Kirby wrapped around a large ring, turning him into his own air ring cannon (which is handy for propelling boats along quickly or spinning out-of-reach fans); Light-Bulb Mouth, which makes Kirby the star of his own walking rave (and might even put Uncle Fester to shame); and Arch Mouth, which lets him pull the decorative frame of an archway down to glide over long distances – perfect for flying through rings or doing a barrel roll to damage nearby foes.

. . . Phew! Kirby trying to swallow a whole car in one gulp seems tame compared to trying to take in all of the many features that make up Kirby and the Forgotten Land! Honestly, any one of these bullet points on the design doc could've made for a great Kirby game alone.

Kirby's first fully 3D adventure? Got it. Sold! A Kirby game in which our hero revitalizes a broken-down town? That's enough right there. A quest in which Kirby can power up his vintage Copy Abilities? A game where he can shapeshift into different forms like Mario did when he captured enemies in Super Mario Odyssey? A journey through an abandoned civilization that has suffered through some kind of unexplained armageddon? Any of them by themselves would've been enough to get fans excited. But instead we're getting all of them fused together into one massively epic quest!

It really looks like Kirby and the Forgotten Land is shaping up to be the most unforgettable Kirby adventure ever. Make plans to begin your exploration starting March 25! **– DAVID**



MARIO STRIKERS: BATTLE LEAGUE

The Mario soccer series is coming back!

A THIRD INSTALLMENT in the much-lauded Mario Strikers series? Yes please! Nobody expected it, and yet here it is in all its armored-toe-kicking glory!

No holds or penalties barred is once again the name of the game, as Mario and his pals will utilize all sorts of nasty tactics like tackles and throwing items to keep control of the ball and score.

The amazing promotional art of this series has always had this cool rough sketch look, and now we'll see it in the game when a special shot is executed. Each playable character has their own devastating special shot to clear the field and hurtle the ball toward the goal.

All of these plays are aided in part by your gear, which is customizable and upgradable. Coins you gather will pay for the upgrades that raise your chosen character's strength, speed, accuracy and more.

But let's talk about the coolest part of this new sequel: the Hyper Shot! Unleashing this all-new kind of incredibly powerful kick requires attaining an orb found on the field, activating it and then charging a shot for strength and accuracy. If you manage to hit the back of the net with a Hyper Shot, you'll score two goals instead of one, which can easily turn the tide!

Also confirmed is an eight-player couch co-op mode that can be played with just one Switch. Online matches can also be played, where friends can form a club or simply join a club with an empty spot. Up to 20 people form a club. Five-on-five matches will be played for glory and bragging rights!

It feels like Nintendo might have more up its sleeve with this one, but look for this sure shot to strike store shelves on June 10! **— BRETT**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NEXT LEVEL GAMES RELEASE: JUNE 10, 2022 RATING: E10+

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

Musou action in the world of Three Houses!

IN HINDSIGHT, THIS seems like a game that somebody should have predicted. After all, we got Hyrule Warriors, which brought together characters from lots of different Legend of Zelda games, and it was followed by Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity, which focused its story on the characters and setting of a single Zelda game: Breath of the Wild. Therefore, the existence of Fire Emblem Warriors, which brought together characters from lots of different Fire Emblem games, should have clued us into the possibility that an Age of Calamity-like follow-up could have been in the works. Well, whether you thought it possible ahead of its reveal or not, that's exactly what this is – Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes is the latest Nintendo musou game, and it's fully based on Fire Emblem: Three Houses.

But that doesn't mean we'll see a retread in its story! Three Hopes is promising an all-new tale with the same cast of characters – a new path added to the several we already had a chance to see in Three Houses three years ago. The story in that game went in different directions depending on which of the Houses you chose at the start, as well as other decisions you made along the way (in Edelgard's story in particular). One frustration Fire Emblem fans have had with Three Houses, though, is that none of the game's endings were exactly "good." Perhaps Three Hopes will finally present a possible future in which Claude, Dimitri and Edelgard all put aside their differences and work together against a common foe?

Gameplaywise, you should know what to expect: hacking through hundreds of soldiers at a time! The onslaught will begin soon, too, as Three Hopes is set to debut this June. **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: TEAM NINJA & OMEGA FORCE RELEASE: JUNE 24, 2022 RATING: RP

SPLATOON 3

Just what exactly happened to the Splatoon planet, anyway?

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: SUMMER 2022 RATING: RP

HUMANITY REALLY MESSED up in the world of Splatoon.

This series is Nintendo's most colorful without a doubt, as it presents a futuristic vision of Earth in which the bulk of the sentient population is fun-loving shapeshifting teenagers who spend their days slinging ink at each other for fun. But all the colorful fun and games are hiding a truly dark past!

Splatoon lore is pretty intense. On this Earth, the humans were so violent and so committed to destroying one another that they fell into a third World War. Then a fourth. Then a fifth!

Seriously – thousands of years before any Inklings had their first Turf War, humans were blasting each other in World War V. Nuclear weapons were unleashed, decimating the population. Climate change was already raging by that point, but then one of the warring nations sent the Earth entirely over the edge and beyond the possibility of any potential for recovering by launching one last nuke . . . directly over Antarctica. They totally destroyed the entire continent in a single, terrifying blast, which instantly melted all its ice and caused catastrophic flooding all around the planet.

The humans were doomed! With sea levels swelling and a huge volume of previously livable land area so suddenly forced underwater, humans had nowhere to live any more. They all died out!

What followed next were centuries of no sentient life on planet Earth. (Except for Judd the Cat, who'd safely been placed into cryogenic sleep by his owner in a safe location.) The seas covering so much more of the planet's surface encouraged ocean life to evolve further, though, and eventually squids found their way up onto land and became the Inklings!

And that, dear friends, is honestly how the Splatoon world developed. How a society of evolved squids now dominates the world 10,000 years into the future, and the only mammal left alive is Judd, who woke up from his multiple-millennia-long nap to judge the results of the Inklings' Turf Wars. (And his cloned son, too, as of Splatoon 2.)

But the past may be coming back to haunt the Inklings in Splatoon 3! With the name of this sequel's story mode being "Return of the Mammalians," it seems like another category of creature is about to make the politics of Inkling society even more complicated. They already have the Octolings and the Salmonids to deal with! What could this new species be?

Perhaps the Splatoon lore as we know it is incomplete? "Mammalians" sounds to my ears like a combination of mammals and aliens, so could a group of warm-blooded land-dwelling Earth animals have somehow escaped the destruction brought on by the humans in the past? Could they have fled to the stars for safety, and could they now be coming back home to reclaim their ancestral lands? (I think there was a Doctor Who episode once about a group of dinosaurs who did exactly that.)

And how much more will we get to see of the ruined remains of human civilization in Splatoon 3? The over-turned Eiffel Tower is striking, but is it a one-off visual moment, or hinting that we may see more? I guess part of this game canonically takes place in what used to be France?

With luck, we won't have to wait much longer to get answers. Splatoon 3 is hitting the Switch soon! **— LUCAS**

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3

The worlds of Shulk and Rex will combine to explore their connected futures!

FEBRUARY'S NINTENDO DIRECT delivered something special for many, but by the final announcement, JRPG fans were really feeling it! That's right: Xenoblade Chronicles 3 will arrive on Nintendo Switch in September!

The Direct featured a debut trailer for the upcoming title from Monolith Soft, showcasing beautiful visuals and music and introducing a new world and its core cast of characters.

This time around the game will star two protagonists: Noah, who appears to have a version of the Monado, and Mio, a Gormotti who wields chakram.

Noah and Mio are from the nations of Keves and Agnus, respectively, and they are "off-seers who mourn for those who've died in battle," according to the game's Japanese website. Part of this role involves playing flutes, and we've seen them doing so together.

The nations of Keves and Agnus are in conflict with one another, and this will serve as the starting point for our new heroes and their allies. These characters will embark on a journey with life as its main theme, according to the game's synopsis.

You may be wondering just how Xenoblade Chronicles 3 will tie in with the series' previous games. In a letter from Executive Director Tetsuya Takahashi, he said XC3 will bring the worlds from both XC1 and XC2 together – then take players to the future. How this new game will do that is still to be revealed, but I think we can glean a few clues from the trailer and visuals!

The key visual seems to showcase the broken greatsword of Mechonis and the wounded body of the Urayan Titan. And this next bit is speculation on my part, but stay with me: In the trailer, we see two characters who resemble Melia from XC1 and Nia from XC2 after several years have passed. I think that's exactly who they are, and I think they now reside in Keves and Agnus.

But I've also got questions. Are they leaders in these lands? Are they in direct conflict with each other? How much time has passed since the previous games?

Takahashi also said in his letter that Xenoblade Chronicles 3 will be enjoyable for those who've played the previous games or those who are new to the series. To me, that sounds like much of the main story could be standalone – with some tie-ins sprinkled throughout.

Xenoblade Chronicles 3 has several returning staff from previous games in the series, including Masatsugu Saito (character design), Koichi Mugitani (key artwork) and Yasunori Mitsuda, Manami Kiyota, ACE (TOMOri Kudo, CHiCO), Kenji Hiramatsu and Mariam Abounnasr (music).

There's a lot we still don't know about Xenoblade Chronicles 3, but from what we've seen so far, there's already plenty to be excited about. I'm looking forward to finding out more in the coming months! **– MAGGIE**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH SOFT
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 2022 RATING: RP

DRAGON QUEST XII: THE FLAMES OF FATE

The series' next mainline sequel draws nearer.

DRAGON QUEST AND Nintendo consoles go together as well as a bunch of slimes forming a big royal blob. Last year's announcement of Dragon Quest XII, the latest entry in the series, brought along with it a plethora of anticipation and speculation. The long-running Dragon Quest series will be celebrating its 36th anniversary this year, and fans are anticipating a potential release of the latest entry with a new look at the gameplay soon. Given that all 11 past mainline entries in the series so far have graced Nintendo platforms, many anticipate Dragon Quest XII to release on the Switch soon.

Dragon Quest XII was officially announced for a worldwide simultaneous release by series creator Yuji Horii during last year's "Dragon Quest Day" stream on the series' anniversary, May 27. It was then that we saw the teaser trailer which did not tell much about the game, simply being a volcanic eruption into the series' familiar logo with a burning number "XII" behind it and the subtitle "The Flames of Fate." Not a whole lot is known about the title yet, however Horii described it as a "Dragon Quest for adults" with a darker tone and explained that players will have choices and decisions that will change the story.

Role-playing games have used player decisions as a major narrative tool for years – a notable example being The Witcher III, where every choice the player makes impacts the world in some way. The idea that Dragon Quest will be implementing a system similar to this will be a huge change, as the franchise has been relatively linear since Dragon Quest V, with few meaningful choices available to players throughout the games. The emphasis on choice as well as the dark tone indicate that this game will likely mark a new direction for the series, abandoning many traditional aspects of the franchise that fans expect.

One of the most traditional aspects of Dragon Quest is the command battle system, in which players take turns making their moves during battle. This system has remained relatively the same for the series' entire history, with some minor tweaks here and there. Horii revealed that the team would be changing the command battle system – although not outright abandoning the system. What this could mean is that the team will be putting some new spin on the turn-based battling we are all familiar with. Players could see some implementation of real-time elements included in a turn-based environment, similar to Chrono Trigger's battle system which allowed party members to sync up their movements and execute special moves with multiple characters.

Yuji Horii was not allowed to reveal information regarding the planned platforms or release date of DQXII, however fans can expect to wait a bit longer for the game to release. Square Enix officially announced that Dragon Quest XII is being made with Unreal Engine 5, which the Nintendo Switch supports. There's still a high possibility that the game will make its way to Nintendo's ecosystem, as the team behind Dragon Quest XI S utilized technical wizardry to make a solid Switch port. It's very possible that we will see an official gameplay reveal in early 2022, when Dragon Quest news usually drops. The game could see a release in late 2022 or even as far away as 2023, making it the longest wait fans have had to endure. Until then, there are other DQ projects in the works that will surely make the waiting easier! **– SACKCHIEF**

SWITCH? PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP

DRAGON QUEST III: HD-2D REMAKE

Will we get to revisit 1992 here in 2022?

WHEN WE PREVIEWED Dragon Quest III: HD-2D Remake last summer, there was a lot of excitement for this nostalgic overhaul of one of gaming's greatest JRPGs. Many dedicated Dragon Quest fans consider the third entry to be one of the finest for its expansive and customizable class system, as well as its massive, nonlinear open world to explore. Dragon Quest III: HD-2D Remake is the latest reimagining of this specific series installment, giving it a new look inspired by Square Enix's Octopath Traveler. And given that it has already been announced for a worldwide simultaneous release, the game should be heading toward Western shores once again, 30 years later. (Dragon Quest III will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of its original North American release as Dragon Warrior III on March 12 this year!)

Fans are expecting the same great game with a brand-new look, so it isn't too far-fetched to expect a release this year considering that much of the basic world design already exists. Some hopeful fans are expecting additional features that may prolong the development time. A hot topic is the potential return of content previously removed from the somewhat disappointing mobile-to-Switch port that was released in 2019. Fan-favorite features such as the Pachisi board that allowed players to unlock strong equipment early, as well as a bonus dungeon from the Game Boy Color remake, now have a chance to return.

Dragon Quest III: HD-2D Remake may become this quest's definitive edition, and it will likely release later this year given the extensive gameplay premiere that was shown during its 2021 reveal. So future players should start planning their journey soon! **— SACKCHIEF**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP

DRAGON QUEST TREASURES

Erik's back!

DRAGON QUEST XI'S Erik will be the next hero to continue the series' long tradition of spin-off games starring a younger version of a mainline party member.

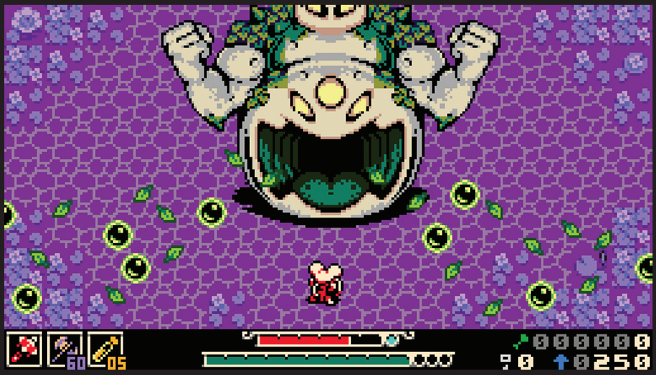
Initial artwork of child versions of Erik and his sister Mia was first teased to be from a new entry in the Dragon Quest Monsters series years ago, however through twists and turns the game was reworked into an entirely new type of spin-off focused on treasure hunting. Dragon Quest Treasures has been described as a "non-traditional" RPG, and we've seen plenty of gameplay already, which has led many to think that it will release soon.

What we've seen from the trailer showcases Erik and Mia being whisked off to another world where they meet some interesting new monsters the series hasn't seen before, including a bat-winged cat and a pig with pixie wings. The game features stylistic cel-shaded art that makes it look different than its mainline counterpart, Dragon Quest XI.

Seeing the debut of an all-new spin-off series is exciting – this has the potential to be a unique kind of RPG that fans haven't experienced before! For example, Treasures' gameplay features platforming segments with Erik enlisting the aid of monsters to traverse different obstacles. He's shown gliding on the series' famous bat monster, the Dracky, and it appears that other famous Dragon Quest monsters can accompany you too, including the Slime and the Restless Armor. This opens up many possibilities for players using monsters to aid in exploring the many levels they will encounter.

Like many other upcoming DQ games, Treasures will be having a worldwide simultaneous release, so Western fans can anticipate playing it the same day as those in Japan. And like the others, we're waiting on a release date! **— SACKCHIEF**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX RELEASE: TBA RATING: RP



MINA THE HOLLOWER

The creators of Shovel Knight present an all-new protagonist!

SINCE ITS FOUNDING in 2011, Yacht Club Games has eaten, slept and breathed nothing but Shovel Knight. Expansion packs, puzzle games, crossover appearances, a flippin' Arby's promotion . . . and there's still the new Shovel Knight Dig game set for later in 2022! While I understand the team owes a tremendous debt to the Blue Burrower, it's also high time they strike a new plot of soil!

And strike they did on February 1, with the launch of a Kickstarter campaign for their newest diminutive champion, Mina the Hollower! Whereas Shovel Knight was pitched as an overclocked NES-esque title in the spirit of Mega Man and DuckTales, Mina the Hollower is presented as a souped-up Game Boy Color-style romp modeled after Castlevania and The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening.

Commanding the spotlight is the titular Mina, a young mouse scientist who excavates the earth in search of raw materials for her latest inventions. She's invited to Tenebrous Isle to investigate its malfunctioning Spark Generators, only to come face-to-face with Gothic terrors straight out of the pages of Dracula, The Picture of Dorian Gray and other literary classics. And if the myriad spooks and specters don't highlight the Castlevania inspiration brightly enough, be aware that our rodent researcher also cracks a wicked whip!

Mina navigates the environment from a top-down perspective, tunneling beneath the surface to evade danger or gain a quick burst of speed, and cycling through various Trinkets and sub-weapons to boost her combat and exploration skills. The quest is presented in 256x144 resolution, matching the Game Boy's vertical dimension but with a widescreen boost — this adherence to GBC tech restrictions with some key allowances emulates the philosophy behind Shovel Knight's creation. And we can't ignore the bangin' soundtrack, once more scored by the illustrious Jake Kaufman!

So, why Kickstarter again? In truth, Yacht Club is financing the bulk of development, and merely using backer funds to expedite the process and avoid previous pitfalls. Thankfully, the trust built among fans over the last few years propelled the campaign past its target within 12 hours from launch!
— TONY

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: YACHT CLUB GAMES RELEASE: DECEMBER 2023 RATING: RP

POCKY & ROCKY RESHRINED

Vintage visuals will fuel this all-new raccoon rumble!

THE SHRINE MAIDEN and raccoon dog are back! For the first time in over 20 years, fans and newcomers alike can fight their way through the mysterious world of the yokai in Pocky & Rocky Reshrined, scheduled for a release on the Switch this year.

The Pocky & Rocky series began on the SNES in 1993 with a story that saw the rise of the evil Black Mantle, a mystical warlord who sought to turn friendly local monsters into his own personal army. It was up to Pocky, a courageous shrine maiden, and Rocky, her magical tanuki friend, to fend off the hordes of mind-controlled creatures and free them from the curse.

Black Mantle has now returned for Reshrined, but thankfully the duo is joined by three new friends! First up is Ame-no-Uzume, the goddess of dance. She's usually a pacifist, but has nevertheless readied her magical swords and sacred rope for the battle ahead. Next is Ikazuchi, the kamitachi who's out for revenge after Black Mantle cast his spell upon her. Finally there's Hotaru Gozen, a slain samurai who opposes Black Mantle's army after being revived by his dark magic.

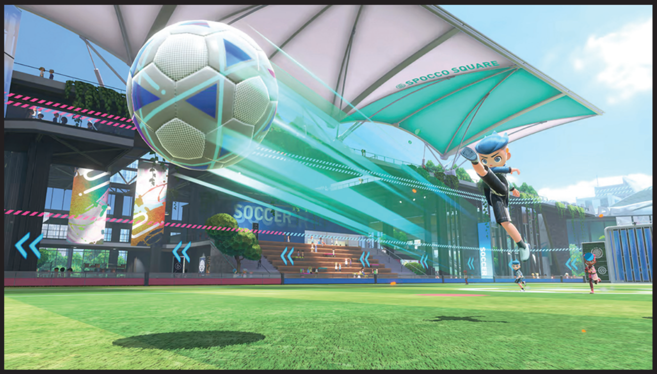
Like previous installments, this game is going to be an action-packed adventure that's easy to pick up but tough to master. You can think of the Pocky & Rocky games as classic arcade shoot-'em-ups — only instead of a forward-facing spaceship flying on autopilot, you can shoot in any direction and move all over the screen. You can sling a ton of projectiles at a rapid-fire pace, but the bad news is that many of your foes are just as capable of totally drowning the screen in a deluge of bullets. Each hero has their own unique offensive and defensive options, and knowing exactly when to block or dodge will be just as important as knowing when to attack.

However, practicing will be a ton of fun when the art and music are this charming! The lively characters and appealing chibi designs have always been a high point of the series, from the grumpy sapient bamboo spirit to the bodybuilding kappa who chucks cherry bombs at you. The animation here is absolutely gorgeous, with every pixel bursting with personality! The backgrounds are equally impressive.

The quest kicks off in a shrine in the middle of autumn, with the beautiful reds and golds of the falling leaves offset by the earthy bricks of the stone walkways and the chartreuse grass. Later the adventure leads through a haunted cliff, where the eerie violets and greys give off a real sense of spookiness while retaining an otherworldly serenity. If you're an aspiring pixel artist, this game will give you a lot of great examples to study!

In a year already packed to overflowing with hype new releases, Pocky & Rocky Reshrined is sure to hold its own with its great looks and gameplay — so give it a shot! **— LINDSEY**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NATSUME DEVELOPERS: TENGO PROJECT & NATSUME-ATARI RELEASE: TBA 2022 RATING: RP



NINTENDO SWITCH SPORTS

The Wii Sports series returns, but it's switching a few things up!

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN trying to replicate the magic of Wii Sports for years, but no matter how solid games like Deca Sports or Kinect Sports were, none could match the simplistic perfection that was the Wii's insanely popular pack-in title. Nintendo followed it up with the massively successful Wii Sports Resort and the considerably less successful Wii Sports Club, but neither of those games managed to deliver the same kind of impact as the original.

The Switch, though, is its own kind of powerhouse. With games like Mario Kart 8 Deluxe, Animal Crossing: New Horizons and Breath of the Wild all soaring to insane sales numbers, the console is no stranger to hosting global phenomenons. But for all its success, there has always been a Wii Sports-shaped hole in its lineup. 1-2 Switch couldn't quite fill it, and the bowling in Clubhouse Games didn't stack up either. There's no question the concept is still fun, but recapturing the magic that made the first game a cultural icon was always going to be a challenge. Fortunately for all of us, it seems Nintendo is finally up to taking a swing at it once again. (Pun very much intended).

Nintendo Switch Sports is a new follow-up that looks to be a delightful mix of old and new. Returning from Wii Sports are Tennis and Bowling – easily the two most popular sports from that game – while Wii Sports Resort only sees one returning event in the form of Chambara (a.k.a. swordfighting), at least so far. Nintendo has announced that Golf will also be added via a free DLC update this Fall, which certainly leaves the door open for even more expansions in the future.

From the little we've seen so far, these sports play pretty much how you remember them. The big difference this time around is the addition of online play, which, given how few people played Wii Sports Club, will be a new experience for most. Bowling in particular seems to have some fun additions, including the ability to play simultaneously with others without having to wait to take your turn. Sadly, 100-pin bowling remains unconfirmed as of this writing, but I'm going to hold out hope that it's in there somewhere.

On the topic of what's new, there's quite a lot. In addition to three new sports, the game features a striking new look that's far more colorful and detailed than previous entries offered. Gone is the iconic Wuhu Island where previous Wii Sports games (as well as Wii Fit and Pilotwings Resort) took place. In its stead we have a new setting that appears to be called Spocco Square. It doesn't have quite as catchy of a name, but it does seem far more lively than its predecessor.

What's more, the inhabitants of Spocco Square aren't Miis! Switch Sports instead features a new type of avatar model that, while not bad-looking in its own respect, definitely doesn't have the same charm. The good news is, you will have the option to use your Miis instead, albeit on realistically proportioned bodies (which is somewhat unsettling). We don't know how deep the Mii customization is going to be either, but hopefully it's more in line with what we saw in the feature-packed recent Switch remake of Miitopia and not just the same basic set of options we had back in 2006.

As for the new events themselves, there's Badminton, Volleyball and Soccer. They all appear to play exactly how you'd expect with Joy-Con motion controls, but Soccer has the added bonus of a mode where you can use the Ring Fit Adventure leg strap to actually kick the ball! (The physical version will include a strap in the box.)

Will Nintendo Switch Sports bring the world together again through a shared love of virtual bowling? We'll have to wait and see. Either way, this game is going to be big! **– KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: APRIL 29, 2022 RATING: E10+

MLB THE SHOW 22

PlayStation Studios is playing ball with Nintendo!?

IN A MOVE seemingly coming from out of left field, a stalwart PlayStation series is heading to the Switch. Sony is bringing the latest installment of their award-winning baseball simulation franchise MLB The Show to Nintendo's system on April 5. This release marks an exciting time for Nintendo and baseball fans, as there has not been a "go anywhere" version of The Show since 2015 on the Vita, and no realistic baseball properties available on any of Nintendo's machines since 2012. If you're new to the franchise or a returning vet, here's what to expect in this version of The Show 22.

One of the main features of The Show games is their ultimate team mode, Diamond Dynasty. DD tasks players with creating a team – picking the logo/name/colors/etc. – and filling that team with players earned from challenges or acquired from The Show Shop for Stubs, The Show's in-game currency. This mode allows players to build teams with current MLB stars, up-and-coming prospects and league legends from decades past.

The Show 2022 promises all-new legends, new prospects and new challenges. A partnership with trading card company Topps brings weekly Topps Now cards highlighting big performances each week of the season. Additionally, Conquest maps (think Risk but baseball) will reward players with new cards, items and Stubs. DD teams can be taken into online PVP matches across all platforms.

Online PVP in The Show takes a few paths, as players can choose to play Ranked Seasons, standard games, Events, short games with special conditions and Battle Royales: three-inning games where you draft a team from a preset pool before playing. Each path offers rewards of their own – earned from winning games or completing various challenges, like "Strike out X number of batters with AL East pitchers." Rewards can then be used to further customize your team.

Then there's Road to The Show. It's a mode that allows players to live their baseball fantasies by creating a player, entering the draft and working their way from the minors to the big leagues. Along the way, coaches will give you goals to help build your stats. Archetypes add another layer of customization to your RTTS player. Leveling up each type will give buffs that can mean the difference between being a big leaguer and a AAA mainstay. Archetypes fit various categories – slugger/slick fielding/flame-thrower – and can be changed as often as you want through your career.

And Franchise Mode! It lets you be the GM of your favorite team and work toward building a dynasty. From signing, drafting and trading players to hiring coaches and scouts, setting lineups and rotations, managing the injury list and, oh yeah, playing games too, Franchise Mode offers unlimited replayability.

That's not all! March to October, Retro Mode, Weekly Challenges, Home Run Derby, Moments . . . there's always something to do. The Show offers a lot of game for $59.99. How will the Switch version ultimately play? We won't know for sure until April, but Sony should definitely want to knock this edition out of the park. **– DAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT & MLBAM DEVELOPER: SAN DIEGO STUDIO RELEASE: APRIL 5, 2022 RATING: E

13 SENTINELS: AEGIS RIM

Hands-on impressions, thanks to the PlayStation version.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ATLUS
DEVELOPER: VANILLAWARE
RELEASE: APRIL 12, 2022 RATING: T

WHAT'S THE BEST weapon to wield against an inevitable apocalypse? Why time travel, of course!

In the world of 13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim, the Earth has been ravaged by huge armies of Godzilla-scaled kaiju beasts. Their repeated, relentless attacks have reduced most of the world to rubble — there's so much destruction, in fact, that it seems like Earth is entirely a lost cause.

And the heroes agree!

Using the power of time travel technology, the would-be saviors of this Earth abandon the ruined future and venture backwards to earlier eras of human history. There, in the time before the monsters destroyed all civilization, they plan a pre-emptive counterattack. Knowing when and where the kaiju will eventually strike, they prepare a strategy — and recruit a team of teenagers with attitude to pilot massive mech suits, too!

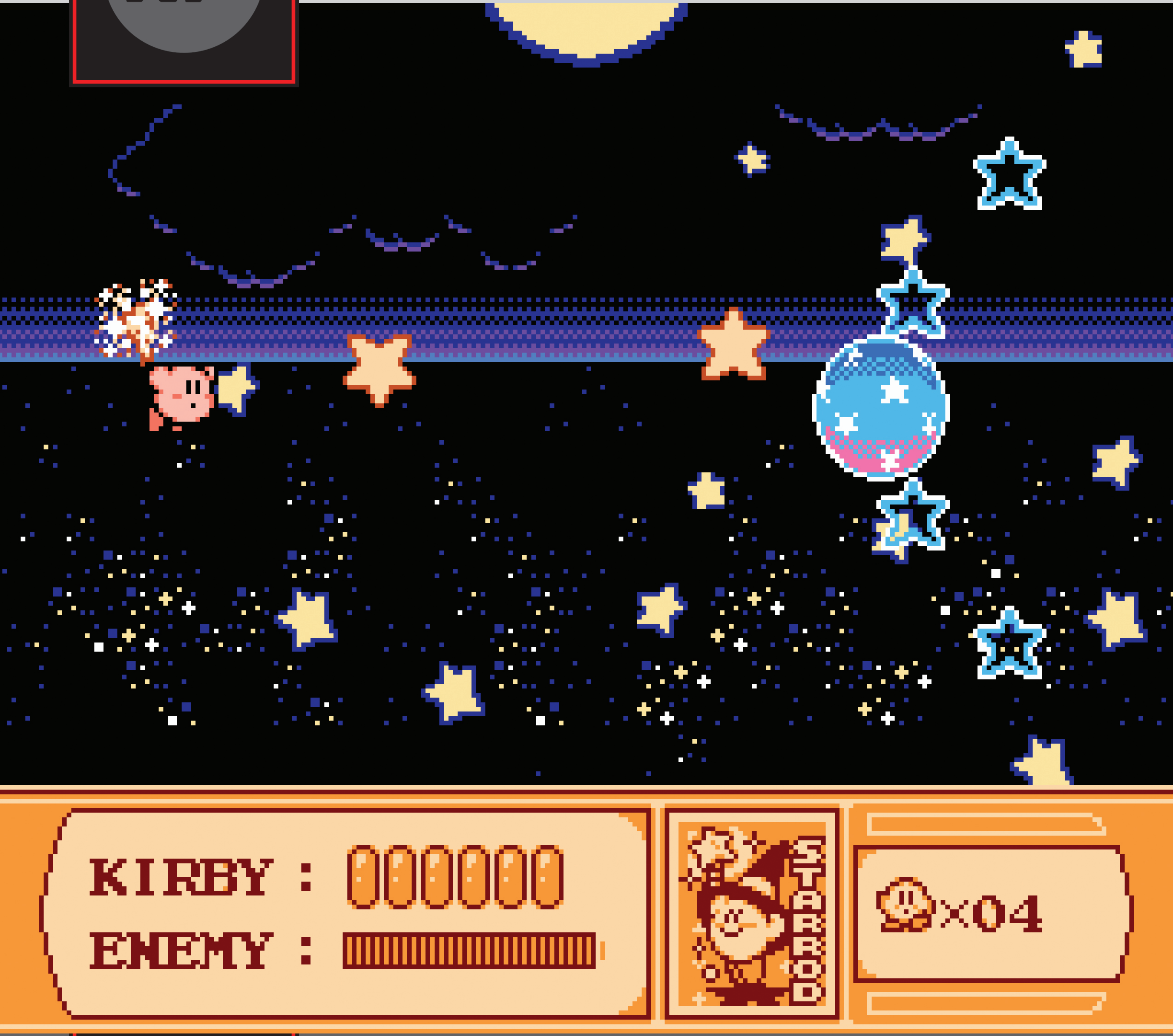
Longtime NF readers know I love a good time travel tale, but honestly I didn't know this game was one before I started playing it. I had just absorbed so many positive vibes from players of the PS4 version posting their glowing impressions online that I felt compelled to purchase a PlayStation copy myself when it was on sale in late 2020. Then . . . it sat on my shelf. Unopened and ignored — until the news of its upcoming Switch port was announced! I finally unshrinkwrapped the package, literally dusted off my irregularly played PlayStation and finally gave it a spin.

I'm thrilled I did! This game is as much of a gem as everyone says it is.

The fact that time travel is involved is only the smallest of spoilers, since that becomes clear almost instantly after you begin to play. The game's story is wildly unlinear, hopping around to several different eras and constantly shifting between protagonists. In one scene you may be playing as young Iori Fuyusaka, walking home after school, chatting about cute boys and deciding whether to eat soft serve or crepes as a snack with your friends. In the next scene you could be placed in control of track athlete Natsuno Minami, getting wrapped up in an E.T.-inspired story of discovering a little alien friend and having to flee from government agents to keep him safe. Then you might get tossed out of the sidescrolling story sequences entirely and find yourself in one of the game's top-down strategy battles, deploying your force of mighty mech suits to stop the advance of the creepy kaijus!

The jumping around might seem like it would make your head spin, but what's great is that after the first few introductory hours, the game steps back from guiding your progress itself and lets you choose what you want to do next. Personally I found Natsuno's story to be the most interesting, so I picked to see more of her adventures before investigating the other options. But if you're more of a battle addict, you can sideline the story scenes and focus your attention on one skirmish after another if you like!

It's flexible. It's beautiful. It's got its hooks into me with its story and it's going to be hard for me to wait for the Switch release and not just finish it on PS4 now that I finally started playing my long-ignored copy! Don't you ignore this game too. **— LUCAS**



NIGHTMARE IN THE NIGHT SKY

KIRBY'S ADVENTURE
NES, 1993

After happily bouncing through the verdant greens of Vegetable Valley, exploring the skyscraping yellow heights of the Butter Building and plunging into the warm waters of the Orange Ocean, Kirby ended his NES Adventure by doing battle with King Dedede at the end of Rainbow Resort. His colorful quest was quickly extended by an unexpected encounter with pure black darkness, though, as the villainous wizard Nightmare erupted into the scene and swept Kirby up into outer space! It was the first time a Kirby game ended by springing a surprise extra final battle against a truly terrifying presence on its players . . . but far from the last. Turn the page to revisit more of Kirby's climactic encounters with chaos! **— LUCAS**

KIRBY VS. CALAMITY

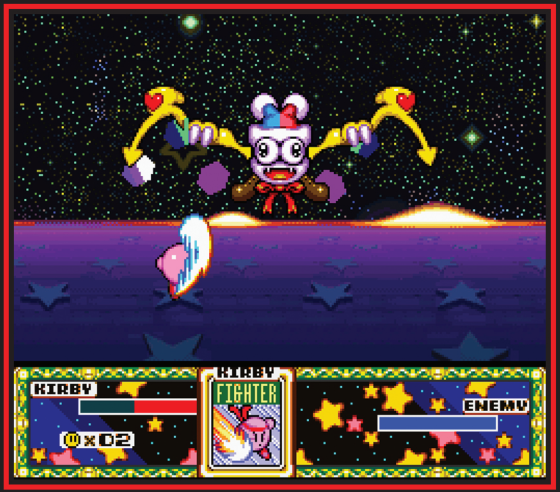
Why does this poor pink puff have to keep fighting chaos incarnate?

AFTER THREE DECADES of existence, the Kirby series has set a few operating standards for itself – and established a few running gags in how its fans have responded to them. Back in Issue #31, we examined one of these long-running trends that has turned into a joke: the fact that Kirby games' box art in America almost always alters Kirby's happy, smiling art from Japan to give him angry eyebrows and a scowl instead. (It's tough to make a character who's literally just a short pink circle with shoes look at all intimidating, but by golly the Nintendo of America marketing team sure has tried their best over the years.)

This time around, let's tackle another trend that more and more fans have taken notice of as more and more Kirby games have been released over time: the fact that Kirby's adventures now almost always come to an end with a battle against some mutated manifestation of absolute chaos. Eldritch abominations. Super freaky dudes!

Just as most games in the JRPG genre seem to start your hero out with slaying rats around their hometown and slowly ramp the intensity up until the final battle has you trying to attack and dethrone some kind of god, so too have the Kirby games become defined by ridiculous extremes in thematic contrast. Our happy pink hero begins his quests in cheerful grasslands on sunny days, then ultimately ends up in psychedelic outer space arenas waging war against the most vile and twisted aberrant horrors to ever leap out of the minds of HAL Laboratory's artists.

Now let's take a look at just a few examples of this trend in action! **— LUCAS**



KIRBY SUPER STAR

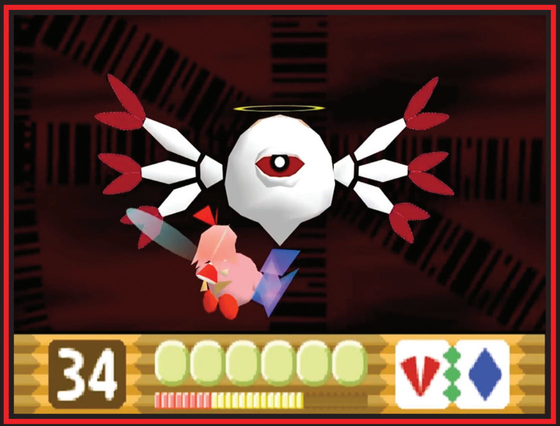
MARX

Kirby fans' trust issues regarding supposedly friendly ally characters probably began circa 1996, as the SNES masterpiece Kirby Super Star introduced us to Marx. At first, Marx resembles Kirby in many ways: He's got a squatty, circular body sitting directly on a pair of shoes. He also wears a jester's cap, a bow tie and a smile – nothing to be afraid of, right? But Marx surprised players by betraying Kirby and transforming into a demented final boss that made such a strong impression that he was brought back for a rematch in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate!

KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 3

ZERO

One of the earliest truly evil final bosses in the series appeared in Kirby's Dream Land 2, when a cycloptic creature named Dark Matter scarily erupted from within King Dedede's body in that game's finale. What's even worse than Dark Matter, though? An even greater being that can create multiple Dark Matters as minions! Zero, in the final fight of Kirby's Dream Land 3, was a final boss who flung other final bosses at you as an attack! Its white coloration, orb-shaped body and similarly singular eye also worked to give players the heebie-jeebies.



KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS

ZERO TWO

The one-upsmanship of the series' final bosses was fairly easy to keep track of in the early years, as each game simply presented a foe that was one more power level above the ultimate encounter of the previous release. So what was stronger than Zero? Zero Two! Also written sometimes as 02 or 0^2 (to be read as "Zero Squared" in order to frighten mathematicians), this was the first fully 3D final boss Kirby ever had to deal with. As with the previous Zero battle, the gameplay of this encounter shifted to become more like a shoot-'em-up, as Kirby joined up with his ally Ribbon the fairy to attack as a tag-team twosome. Together, they wielded the Crystal Shard Gun, launching the game's titular collectables into the enemy's mono-eye as ammunition!

KIRBY MASS ATTACK

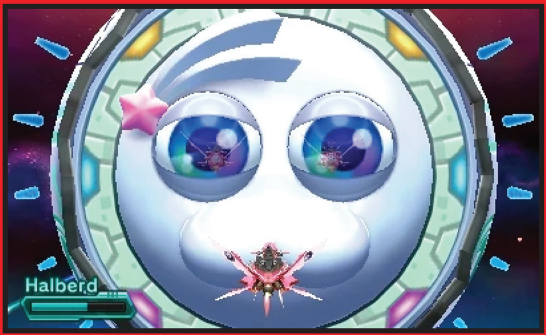
NECRODEUS

Sinister forces of darkness may have different motivations for attacking our poor Kirby, but it doesn't get any more straightforward than a force of darkness literally wanting all actual light to go away. If Necrodeus had his way, daytime would be no more on Planet Popstar – along with eliminating all lamps, flashlights and campfires too, I suppose. Kirby would have a harder time finding his way toward his next meal with no light whatsoever, though, so he opposes this dreadlord with 10 times his normal strength! Also, Necrodeus would be an intimidatingly evil presence even aside from his dark ambitions, as he's the leader of the Skull Gang, he looks like a nightmare kids would have after eating too much Halloween candy and he might actually be a god of the dead.

KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND

MAGOLOR

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me! Perhaps thinking Kirby players might have forgotten about Marx's treachery from way back in 1996, the developers at the helm of 2011's Return to Dream Land decided to play the same trick again. This time around the cheerful "friend" Kirby met early on was named Magolor, and he was a down-on-his-luck alien who has just accidentally crashed his starship into the surface of Planet Popstar, scattering its 120 Energy Spheres and several major components all over the surrounding area. (He could even give Captain Olimar a run for his money when it comes to ship-destroying crash landings!) Kirby teams up with King Dedede, Meta Knight and Bandana Waddle Dee to find and collect the lost ship pieces, but as soon as they complete the job Magolor makes a major heel turn and unleashes his pent-up alien anger! The friends pursue him into a dimensional rift while riding on dragons (righteous!) and put an end to his evil schemes. Later, he apologies and builds Kirby a theme park!



KIRBY: PLANET ROBOBOT

STAR DREAM

Speaking from personal experience, no final battle in any other Kirby game has ever matched the intensity of the one in Planet Robobot. Video games are almost obligated to have multiple phases for their final bosses – defeating the ultimate foe has nearly always just been a preamble to witnessing him, her or it go through a transformation sequence and then attack you again using a larger, more powerful form (with a fully recharged health bar). So I expected that same stereotype to hold true again at the end of this game . . . but was surprised when the battle against Star Dream held not two, and not three, but *four* uniquely different phases! I think I was nearly hyperventilating by the end of it. It didn't help matters that its transformations caused it to look so creepy, either – just look at the piercingly unsettling eyes on that thing! Alas, it had to be defeated, as it was an evil supercomputer that wanted to eliminate all organic life on Planet Popstar. No way!

KIRBY STAR ALLIES

VOID TERMINA

There are several more examples of disturbingly psychotic ultimate boss battles in other Kirby games, and we're likely soon due for another at the end of Kirby and the Forgotten Land (Elfilin, I've got my eye on you), so I encourage you to play any game in the series that strikes your fancy and discover for yourself what horror lies in wait at the end, guarding the end credits. But we'll end here with the gigantic titan Kirby and his friends are forced to face off against at the end of 2018's Switch adventure, Star Allies. Void Termina has an appropriate name, because he kind of looks like he's wearing Majora's Mask. His bodybuilding routine may be based on Regigigas' too, as he's a hulking brute that towers over the battlefield – until he transforms, of course, moving into his own different final boss phases. At one point he looks like an angel, flapping up into the sky. At another he resembles Dark Matter, calling back over 20 years to Dream Land 2. But ultimately he looks like Kirby himself, for one final freak-out!

CHARACTER PROFILE
BANDANA WADDLE DEE

Kirby's spear-wielding pal is all set to skewer the foes of the Forgotten Land. How did this cloth-clad spin on a common enemy design rise to secondary superstar status? Let's take a look at his career over the years!

FIRST APPEARANCE
KIRBY SUPER STAR
(SNES, 1996)

CAREER HIGHS

Earns a promotion for Super Star Ultra, as he defends King Dedede's honor by facing Kirby as a boss character. (Still easy to beat, though.)

'08

And then a major surge in status! Bandana Waddle Dee became a full playable character alongside Kirby, King Dedede and Meta Knight.

'11

Was recognized as a special Guest Star in Kirby Star Allies, and even got a new move added to his arsenal in a post-release patch!

'18

Bandana Waddle Dee has had a few downs mixed in with his many ups, but on the whole his career trajectory has been positive, making him a more and more prominent part of the Kirby franchise every year since his first appearance on the SNES.

'22

He's now regarded as the series' fourth-biggest character after King Dedede, Meta Knight and Kirby himself. And his star may yet climb further, as his role in Forgotten Land looks like it'll be his biggest yet!

CAREER LOWS

'96

Makes his debut as an opponent in Kirby Super Star's Megaton Punch minigame . . . but he's kind of a pushover. Really easy to defeat.

'14

That didn't mean he remained playable permanently, though. He still got downgraded to small cameos and helper roles from time to time.

'18

Having developed a fervent fandom, there were lots of requests for Bandana Dee to join the Smash cast . . . but he only got a Spirit.

HIGHLIGHTS

KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND
Wii, 2011

Maybe a hot take here, but I'd say that the four-player co-op adventure presented by the Kirby series in the Wii era outclassed its counterpart from the Mario brand. New Super Mario Bros. Wii gave Mario and Luigi two nameless Toads to fill out four player spots, but in Return to Dream Land every player got a unique star, including the spear-spinning Bandana Waddle Dee!

KIRBY AND THE RAINBOW CURSE
Wii U, 2015

The biggest console Kirby game of the following hardware era boosted Bandana Waddle Dee's screen time even further, as it kicked Meta Knight and King Dedede out of the main gameplay and gave our bandana-wearing buddy a couple of clones of his own! Kirby needed all the help he could get, seeing as how he'd been transformed into a limbless rolling ball.

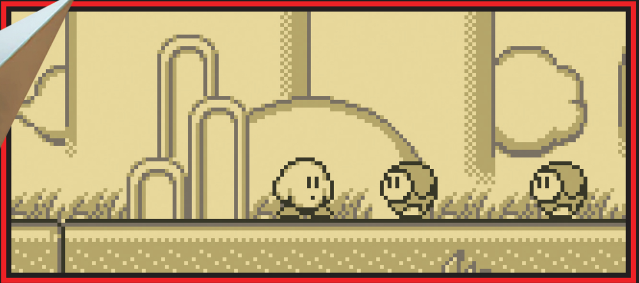
KIRBY AND THE FORGOTTEN LAND
SWITCH, 2022

No longer the character set aside for Player 4, Bandana Waddle Dee has climbed the ladder all the way up to being Kirby's Player 2 partner! Co-op in Kirby games has been a blast in the past, and it'll be extra fun (and on-point plotwise) to have Bandana Dee working alongside Kirby to rescue his fellow Dees after they've been taken captive by the brutal members of the Beast Pack.

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

"I'm not just a pretty face!"

- **KIRBY STAR ALLIES** (SWITCH, 2018)



ONE AMONG MANY

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Like Yoshi or Toad in the Mario games, Bandana Waddle Dee is a singular star drawn out of a population of nearly identical lookalikes. His signature spear and unique headgear set him apart from common Waddle Dees, who have been the most basic and easy-to-beat foes in the Kirby series for 30 years now. Though other Dees do wield weapons from time to time: It's not unusual for Kirby to see Dees armed with umbrellas (who then grant the Parasol power once inhaled).

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

AT LONG LAST, it's time to stop riding dinosaurs and start hunting them! (Wait, is that really any better?) The long-awaited Turok: Dinosaur Hunter adorned the cover of the March 1997 (#94) issue of Nintendo Power, heralding a 12-page spread on Acclaim and Iguana's first-person shooter for the Nintendo 64.

Other Fun Machine titles included tips and tricks for Killer Instinct Gold and a preview of FIFA 64, with the two sharing a poster as well. DOOM 64 got a preview, and Mario Kart 64's time trial tips were accompanied by a contest that would see winners get their best times published in print and on the Nintendo Power Source website, then receive a Mario Kart 64 phone card and maybe even a coveted gold Nintendo 64 controller!

The Super NES and Game Boy got some love, too, in the form of Harvest Moon and EarthBound tips in Epic Center, a Super Mario RPG "Beat the Boss Special" plus strats for Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame on Game Boy and the already-classic The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening.

It was also time to find out the nominees for the 1996 Nintendo Power Awards Player's Poll contest, and with this being the first year Nintendo 64 games were on the docket, you can imagine how things might have been a little slanted in their favor. But while the Game Boy seemed to be all but effectively shut out of the proceedings (it still had its own category for "Best Game"), the Super NES still put up a respectable showing with titles such as Donkey Kong Country 3, Street Fighter Alpha 2 and Super Mario RPG there to represent Super Power. One new category that would last only another year was a "More Annoying Than . . ." award, which was named this year for the dance craze known as "The Macarena." (Kids, ask your parents. If you're feeling particularly daring, demand that they demonstrate.)

A *third* contest, this one centered around designing the video game console of the future, and Pak Watch closed things out with an exclusive peek at "Zelda 64." Star Fox 64 and F-Zero for Japan's Broadcast Satellaview were also shown.

The next issue was for April 1997, but there was no time for fooling around – a bomb was on the loose, and it was up to our cover heroes, the Blast Corps, to clear the way! Other N64 coverage included more Turok, more DOOM 64, a Clay Fighter 63 1/3 preview/interview, Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey and a Dark Rift preview.

Other coverage included a guide to getting the best ending in Super Metroid, maps for DOOM 64's 16-bit predecessor and looks at Kirby's Star Stacker and Game & Watch Gallery for the Game Boy. In addition, a "Beat the Boss" guide covered several Super NES and Game Boy titles.

Ever wonder what working as a video game bug tester involves? A four-page feature went into detail about just what the job entails – it isn't as simple as just playing video games all day long. It's work!

Six new flavors of Game Boy Pocket were revealed, and 25 winners who found all the Game Boy Pockets hidden throughout the issue would win one of their very own! This month's Player's Poll contest was Turok-themed, with the winner getting to appear in the game's sequel!

Closing things out, Pak Watch previewed Yoshi's Island 64 (renamed to Yoshi's Story), Star Fox 64 and Top Gear Rally, among others. **– DAVID**

ISSUE #94: MARCH 1997

ISSUE #95: APRIL 1997

EARTHBOUND 64

They may look like the Runaway Five, but this pop group is known as Desperado Crush Mambo Combo, or D.C.M.C. They're working on a new song, which they'll perform at the Chichiboo inn.

Feast your eyes on the first collection of EarthBound 64 screen shots and characters from Nintendo. As you can see in this expanded Epic News gallery, the variety in the new EarthBound is tremendous, even at this early stage of development. (In Japan, this game is known as Mother 3. There was a Famicom game that never came out on the NES and Mother 2, which appeared in North America as EarthBound for the Super NES.) We don't know much about the game's plot at this point, but it does involve many of the characters from the original Super NES game, including Dr. Andonuts and the race of nose people known as Mr. Saturns. We expect the new EarthBound to have even more of an adventure feel because of its rich, 3-D world. Currently scheduled for release on the 64DD following the release of Zelda 64, EarthBound 64 most likely won't arrive in North America until sometime next year. It may seem like a long time to wait, but the promise of a game of such truly epic proportions should keep players on the edges of their seats. If you're wondering where all the wonderful images come from, it is the EAD group at Nintendo Co. Ltd. in Kyoto. Art Director of Mother 3, Ashura Ito, even provided Epic Center with his rough sketches of possible characters and scenes for the game. One thing we've learned from studying these pictures is that EarthBound 64 is bound to be a marvel of the imagination.

Some of the characters in this room look like characters from the original game, but they are really newcomers. The development team at EAD assures us that this sort of crowd isn't found packing every scene.

In this pic, several kids are approaching the wagons to buy something. In the background is Great Rock, which looks like a castle. The area used to be a quarry, but we don't know if this is where the meteorite fell in the previous game.

Duster sleeps all day and works at night. His favorite haunt is the Chichiboo inn.

The village Godfather may make you an offer you can't refuse. Beware of his motives.

Ryukka is one of the central characters. The boy often wanders in the woods near Tazmily village where he finds many wild animals and dangerous adventures.

A waitress at the Chichiboo may give you special information if you tip her well.

Yosaku is a body builder who enjoys a nice run through the woods.

This peddler and his monkey, Sarusa, will be selling some secret item.

This desert army is led by a vehicle called Pork Bean. We don't know the mission of these soldiers and machines, but they seem deadly serious.

Tazmily Village is pictured here. The store in the foreground features a sidewalk cafe. In the background you can see the local hotel.

Although this village woman is called Lisa, she insists that she is not Lisa. She tends the store in Tazmily and tells shoppers that she doesn't tend the store. So what does she mean when she says that she is free for a date?

Dr. Andonuts invents surprising things, such as the ice-cream-cone shaped tank in the desert. At this point, the good doctor is only a tentative addition to the game.

Here in the jungle, the EAD team has identified several of the critters including the Shipopos in the pond and the snake, Hade Hebi, which climbs in the Baobabu tree and shakes its tail like a rattlesnake.

Various characters and beasts that will inhabit the EarthBound 64 world have already taken shape. You'll find everything from a standing crocodile to an almost human orangutan.

52 NINTENDO POWER

VOLUME 94 53

THE EARTHBOUND THAT NEVER WAS

Ah, what might have been. Two pages of NP #94 showed us many of the characters that might have appeared in EarthBound 64, but it was not to be, as that EAD-developed game was eventually cancelled. However, some of them would make it into the eventual Mother 3, released on Game Boy Advance in Japan nine years later!

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION
EARTH SEEKER

One apocalypse that only Japan's players got to experience.

BACK IN THE early 2010s, Monster Hunter was huge in Japan – but just about nowhere else. While it lacked complete global saturation, it still had the muscle to influence all sorts of other franchises. MonHun's signature feel is all over big names like Skyward Sword, Xenoblade Chronicles and Final Fantasy XIV. It was only a matter of time before it, or a game like it, became a worldwide sensation.

This was Earth Seeker's ambition. It was created by Noritaka "Poo" Funamizu (producer on Monster Hunter and X-Men vs. Street Fighter) and Katsuhiro Sudo (The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords, Marvel vs. Capcom 2). After leaving Capcom in 2004, they formed Crafts & Meister, their independent studio, starting off with game adaptations of anime/manga classics like Dragon Ball Z and Gundam before moving on to all original titles. 2011's Earth Seeker was one of their first. Its "Studio Ghibli meets Monster Hunter" hook wasn't exactly groundbreaking, but it sure was fun!

Like in MonHun, and many of Ghibli's best films, the goal here is to explore small, lush areas overgrowing with flora and fauna. You're assisted by cute, weird, muppet-looking helpers, but instead of cat-like Felynes, these little goofs are more like elemental goblins. After you head out, these "guardians" work as your party, joining in on your search for scraps of human culture strewn throughout the countryside on a planet called Pangea. You battle bizarre, ginormous beasts at every turn, exploring their elemental-based strengths and weaknesses in your fight to survive on an alien planet. It's downright Pikmin-esque!

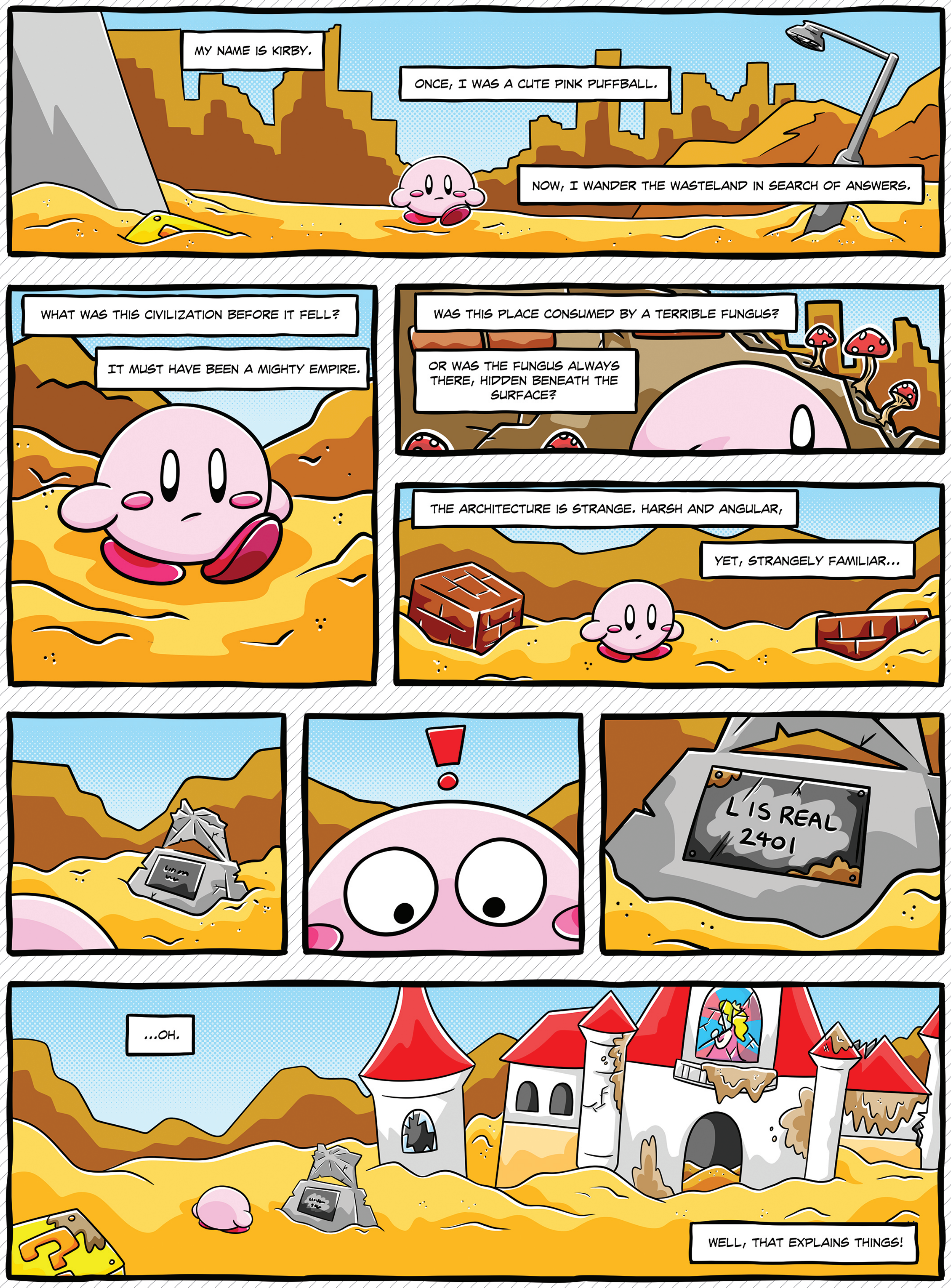
But is Pangea a new world, or is it Earth, except without all those pesky humans mucking it up? Has the planet finally been given a chance to reclaim itself from the polluters who once dominated the globe? The Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower are here too, covered with vegetation. But is this their natural home, or were they transplanted? That's just the start of the questions that Earth Seeker casually poses as the action carries on. Why is your small group of stranded survivors (called Earthnoids) all women? Why are they growing a man named "Adam" in some sort of cloning pod? Why is your leader a skeletal matriarch with enormous eyeballs named Rosa, sitting in a levitating orb? And why do the guardians work for saké?

Thanks to a recent fan translation, you can finally seek some of those answers yourself. With a host of fantastic character designs, a "Time Stop" battle system that marries turn-based and free-roaming combat and a rhythmic "explore, battle, head back to the base, repeat" structure, Earth Seeker is easy enough to jump into. Like one of the relics you unearth in the game, Earth Seeker is a hidden gem from a bygone era, gleefully awaiting your discovery. **– JONATHAN**

ORIGINAL RELEASE:
Wii, JUNE 23, 2011 (ONLY IN JAPAN)
PUBLISHER: ENTERBRAIN
DEVELOPERS: CRAFTS & MEISTER, KADOKAWA SHOTEN

THE FAN EFFORT

Earth Seeker sold just 4,000 copies in its first week in Japan – it flopped. But it still made headlines, sitting on the periphery of the "Operation Rainfall" Wii localization movement. That led to some interest from importers, but being a text-heavy RPG, not too many English speakers understood it. Now they can, thanks to Brand Newman, fan translator of other Wii titles like Line Attack Heroes, Takt of Magic, Night of the Sacrifice and Zangeki no Reginleiv. The patch works with Wii emulators, though using an original disc is recommended.



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

INTERVIEW

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
December 9 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada

FAVORITE FOOD
Mexican & Japanese

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
Ukrainian heritage. Touring musician. Has lower back pain sometimes.

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Pixel Artist, Composer and Final Boss at LABS Works

BEST KNOWN FOR
Going viral on the internet for a trick shot. (20,000,000+ views, but uncredited. Still mad about that!)

MATT KAP

The artist who envisioned the pixel-powered apocalypse of Astalon: Tears of the Earth!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: Why'd you first get into video game development?
MATT: As soon as my parents brought home an NES and I played Super Mario Bros. for the first time, I knew I was gonna make video games, so it was never really a decision. It was destiny!

Then, in 3rd grade, I used to draw up 50-page game design documents for RPGs and mail them to Squaresoft. Sadly, they never responded. I had a good one for Nintendo too . . . a design for a first-person Metroid game! I should have trademarked that one, hahah.

You're a wildly successful pixel artist for hire, with Edmund McMillen's Binding of Isaac series, Panzer Paladin from Tribute Games and a bunch more under your belt. What inspired you to start LABS Works, your own studio, on top of your contract work?
Funny thing – I never actually *looked* to do any work for hire. I had an opportunity to work on Isaac, which was one of my favorite games at the time, so I took it. And once I was knee-deep, I kept meeting more and more cool people with cool projects, and it was just too hard to say no to anyone, so I just kept doing the work! But as with most artists, I do my best work when I'm uninhibited and making art for myself, so that's why I started LABS. Just so I could make what I want, in hopes that other people might like it too!

Astalon: Tears of the Earth (LABS Works' first game) is actually the second part of the story, taking place after a magical apocalypse ravaged the planet. Why did you choose to start the series with the sequel to a game we've never played?
I guess we *did* pull a "Star Wars," huh? I liked the idea of the players having a vertical slice of what's going on with a small bunch of characters, and then to be able to branch out from there in subsequent prequels, sequels and side stories. I always meant for Astalon to be a series of smaller and slightly more experimental games. There's more coming!

Astalon's player characters are cool and cute, eschewing realism for a more iconographic look, while the castle they explore feels gritty and threatening. And that goes double for the bosses! They're anything but cute. What inspired you to juxtapose these sweet, superdeformed protagonists against these granularly textured, foreboding horrors?
I love cute '80s video game character design, but also extreme horror and dark stories, so I mixed the two! It's probably some leftover residue from my childhood. Stuff like Ren & Stimpy, Garbage Pail Kids and Dinosaurs Attack! It's also probably why The Binding of Isaac resonates with me so much! I wanted to show that these characters live in a dead and dangerous world, but I wanted to make sure that the main character designs were still charming and memorable.

One of Astalon's hidden characters looks a lot like Simon Belmont, but he's far from the leading man of the game. You could have put him out in front, but instead, you put a trio of new faces in the spotlight. How did you balance your drive to make Astalon its own new, unique thing with your urge to pepper in throwbacks to beloved classics?
My first game, Castle in the Darkness, was all about homages, throwbacks and parodies. With Astalon I wanted to do the opposite, and make something that plays a bit differently than many other Metroidvania-style games that lean too much on their inspirations. There are still a few references to the beloved classics – the character you mentioned being one of them – but they are hidden and optional so as to not take the focus away from what makes Astalon unique.

No one is better at mixing newness with nostalgia than Limited Run Games. How did your recent partnership with them come about, and how has it been to work with them?
Working with the Limited Run Games team has been a completely smooth process, and everyone that I've dealt with there has been great and easy to work with! We got connected through Jeremy Parish, who I had met a couple times at trade shows. I sent him a copy of the game just to play because I know he likes those kinds of games, and it turned out that he worked at Limited Run Games! LRG is doing awesome things for both small game developers and established companies. Lately, some of the revivals have been totally crazy, like the Valis collection! What?! I think Astalon + LRG is a great fit, and I'm glad to have Astalon join those prestigious ranks.

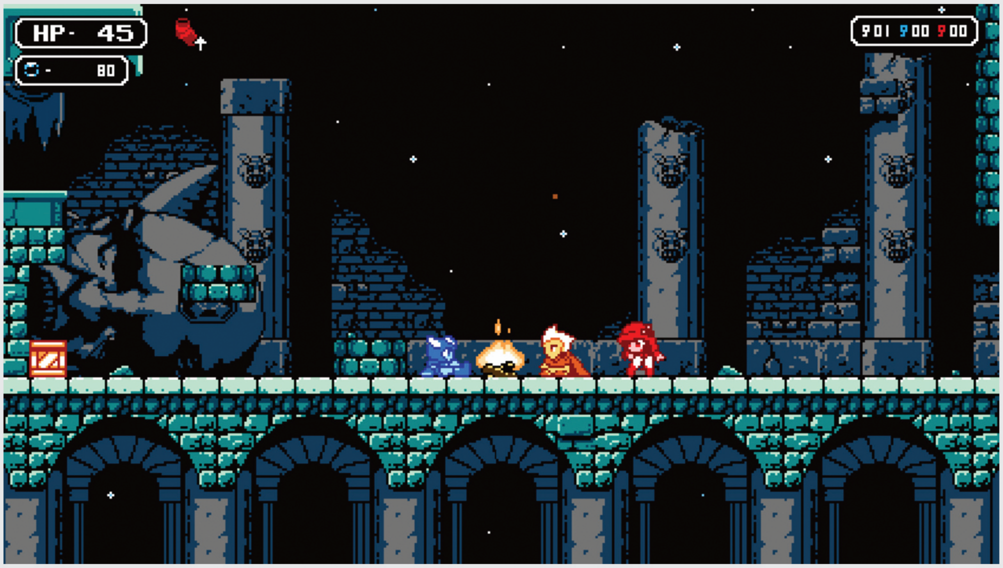
And why and how did you get Ryusuke Mita, creator of the classic manga and anime series Dragon Half, onboard the LABS Works team?
When I was a kid, I had a Chinese-language copy of Ryusuke's book Darkhair Captured. Although I didn't know what was going on in the book, I would carry it around and study his art by copying his drawings. It's safe to say that that was around the time I started to take drawing seriously.

Fast forward many years, and I find Ryusuke online! I couldn't resist sending a message to explain (through a language barrier, no less) how much impact that one book had on me all those years ago. After talking for a bit, I told him I was making video games, and asked if he had any interest in doing some drawings for an untitled prototype, and he accepted the proposition. That untitled prototype became Astalon, and the rest is history! Ryusuke is a really cool guy, super down-to-earth and humble. Follow him on Twitter: @ryusukemita!

You mentioned that before creating Astalon, you created Castle in the Darkness, another high fantasy 2D action-adventure. What keeps you coming back to the genre, and where would you like to take it from here?
I *really* love fantasy settings and games that give the player a sense of surprise and discovery. So I'll probably always work on those kinds of games (LABS already has a couple more in development, including my upcoming pride and joy, Castle in the Darkness 2). BUT! I also have designs for a maze game, a robot fighting game, a multiplayer versus game and a tactics game. Sorry for the ambiguity – I don't want to give too much away in case I am able break away from my curse of only making adventure games, haha!

You're one of a very small group of successful developers who do it all: art, coding, game design and even music. I'm always surprised by that last one, as composing and playing music seem like totally different skills than pixel art and game design. Why is it that you've decided to take on so many of the different responsibilities behind game development, and what's the trick to making them all work together?
The trick is social sacrifice. Hahah!

Jokes aside, I've always played in punk rock bands growing up, and the punk scene is really big on the DIY ethic. It's something that stuck with me. Don't have a singer? Learn to sing.



Do it yourself. No merchandise? Buy blank shirts, learn to silk screen. Do it yourself. Couldn't afford album recording? Learn to record. Do it yourself. This kind of ethic is still ongoing with my current band, Mute. We tour the world at this point, and it's all thanks to so many years of hard work and improvement, learning and persistence. I guess it's kinda like experience points, isn't it?

Anyway, when I got into game development, it was exactly the same. At that time, I didn't have any online presence, and I didn't know anyone else who made games. So, I just did everything I could by myself. I researched and practiced as much as I could, and was able to pull together Castle in the Darkness mostly alone. But that was out of necessity, of course. These days I am fortunate to be working alongside the brilliant Simon Parzer (Castle in the Darkness 2's programmer), the awesome Jon Lepage (Astalon's programmer), Dangen Entertainment (Astalon's publisher) and the rest of the still-small-but-growing LABS team!

Do you have any words of advice for people who are considering getting into game development?
My most important piece of advice is to show your stuff on the internet. You may not feel confident in what you're making, but one piece of feedback every now and then might be all you need to stay motivated and finish your project! Staying motivated for weeks/months/years is actually one of the harder aspects of making games that most people don't mention.

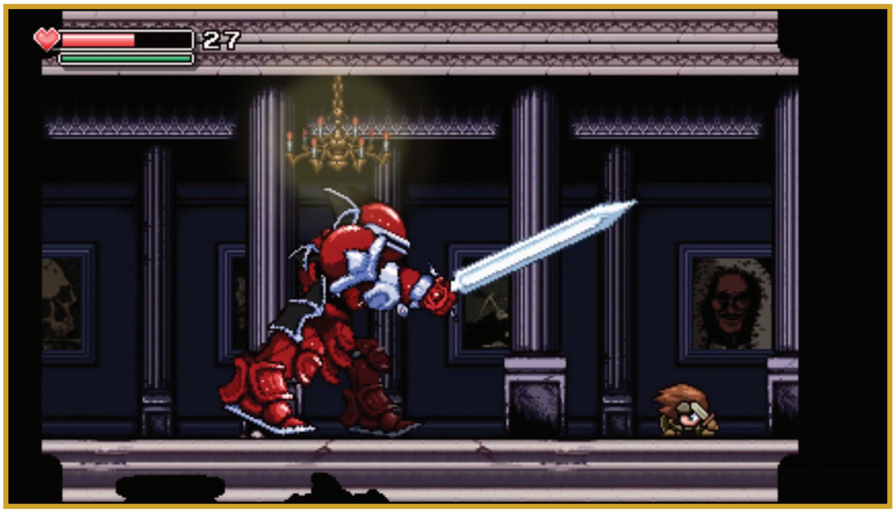
Also: Don't quit game development if you don't make easy money with your first game. That rarely ever happens, and with such an expanding and easily accessible industry, there will be a lot of competition. But your second game will probably be better than your first, and your third even better, and so on. Focus on improving your work every time. Be open with feedback, and just keep at it!

You have an amazing way of drawing Pokémon. If you had total creative control, is that the Nintendo franchise you'd most want to work on, or is there another that you'd rather take a crack at?
Hah! For those who don't know, @ilovebadfriends is my separate page where I draw "extra cute" (also rather unsettling) parody versions of characters. As a personal art project, I drew characters that resemble 151 OG Pokémon in that style, and I'm slowly posting them there.

However, after all those drawings, I'm all Pokémon'd out! If I could work on any Nintendo franchise, I'd stay away from the big ones like Metroid and Zelda, and instead probably pick something like The Frog for Whom the Bell Tolls. That one is super charming and Nintendo hasn't done much with its franchise beyond the original Japan-only Game Boy game. Either that, or a sequel to Super Mario Land 2! I've been on a Game Boy kick lately!

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
To jump through dimensions like that '90s show Sliders. (Except I am able to come home whenever I feel like it and not get further lost in the multiverse every episode, haha!)

Thanks for having me, Nintendo Force! This was fun! NF



TAKE A FIRST LOOK AT MATT'S UPCOMING CASTLE IN THE DARKNESS 2

One of the great things about starting small is it gives you infinite room to grow. The original Castle in the Darkness is a relatively straightforward retro action game, packed with death traps and throwbacks. There's sword-swinging frogs, bone-tossing skeletons, bubble-blowing dragons and even a painting of Vigo the Carpathian! As jaw-dropping as that all sounds, the sequel looks downright "Super" in comparison. Like a next-gen SNES reboot of an NES game that never existed, Castle in the Darkness 2 reimagines the first game's core concepts and gives them all a full-body, 16-bit turbocharge. Where the knight of the prequel was largely stoic and stiff, the sequel's new leading man Zeni slashes and dashes into battle. Combating slinky snake women, massive suits of armor and a pirate ship made of bones, the action all around has been upsized to match the high level of visual fidelity, and best of all, Zeni's doing it all for love! There are also new mechanics to explore. On the offensive side, there are collectable magic cards that blast foes with elemental damage. When playing defense, you can now block, dodge and roll through enemy attacks. I wouldn't go so far as to call it complex, but like with all of Matt's games, there's more in store here than meets the eye. Many unseen secrets have been slotted into Castle in the Darkness 2 since it was first announced in 2019. Hopefully these deep-seeded surprises will bear fruit with an official release here in 2022!

PHOTO BY GABRIELLE GUITÉ

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

REVIEWS

A whole new (or is it old?) region in the Pokémon world is now available to explore! The land of Hisui isn't suffering the after effects of an apocalypse, but its placement in the past relative to other Pokémon titles means its setting is similarly spartan – it's just you against a whole wilderness full of Pocket Monsters both familiar and fresh. So is it fun to creep up on these creatures to capture and catalog them? Find out in our expansive review of the all-new **Pokémon Legends: Arceus**!

The Search for Sinnoh

POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS

SWITCH PUBLISHERS: NINTENDO & THE POKÉMON COMPANY
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK RATING: E

THE POKÉMON WORLD as we knew it will never be the same again.

For two and a half decades now, the mainline Pokémon series has taken only small steps forward with each new sequel. What began as a straightforward JRPG on the black-and-white original Game Boy became a slightly more complex JRPG with a splash of color for its second installment. Then the standard was set, as each next sequel added more monster designs to the mix while slowly inching the visual presentation forward bit by bit. The series' transition into 3D has been especially sluggish, as it's been apparent that the developers have been out of their depth for years now.

And while Game Freak has not magically been restaffed by technical wizards overnight, the devs in charge of the world's highest-grossing media property ever seem to have finally had the courage to take a big step forward with Pokémon Legends: Arceus. This is a brand-new game. A brand-new approach. A brand-new way to play in the world of Pokémon!

Welcome to the Pokémon series' first open-world adventure. The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild has been the point of comparison most people have used, and while it's not a perfect match for what we're getting here, it's close enough to get the gist: This is a Pokémon game in which you're given the freedom to explore at your own pace, in whatever direction you choose, in large, open, fully 3D environments. It's a drastic departure from the linear journeys of past Pokémon games, in which you'd simply travel from a predetermined Point A to Point B, being cautious of tall grass along the way. In fact, the most fun part of this new design is that now the Pokémon are the ones who need to fear tall grass!

You've been tasked to fill out the ancient Hisui region's first Pokédex. To do that, you must venture into the wild and creep up on Pokémon where they live — then catch them unawares by tossing a Poké Ball right at them!

It's a gameplay system unlike any ever seen in a game before. It's kind of a stealth game, in that you need to take care that your intended target doesn't see you before you toss the Ball to try to catch them — otherwise they might run away or attempt to attack you. It's also kind of like a third-person shooter game, because you've got to line up a crosshairs to be able to hurl your Ball with the correct trajectory to make contact — if you're off the mark, your target will again be alerted to your presence, and then it will be time again for either flight or fight.

When these moments do turn into battles, that's when the gameplay steers back toward old Pokémon standards. You've got your own set of partner monsters, and you toss one out to do battle with your wild target. It's then a turn-based tussle as both creatures trade blows back and forth until one or the other faints — or until you've lowered your target's health enough to toss a Ball and catch them the old-fashioned way. (No need to line up a crosshairs to keep tosses on target if you're in the middle of a fight — the game will kindly handle that automatically.)

Thankfully, though, even these battle scenes feel fresh thanks to a few new innovations injected into them as well. Pokémon can now pick to unleash moves in Agile Style, which weakens their impact but gives them a chance to move again afterward faster than before, or Strong Style, which offers the opposite trade: more power at the expense of having to wait longer to act again. Using either of the two optional Styles also increases the accuracy of the selected move, which impacts your tactical calculations as well. Sometimes you need a sure hit!

The battle system has impressed me. But what really pushed my appreciation over the top was the introduction of a feature I've been waiting to see for decades: You can finally teach your Pokémon more than just four moves! Only four can be active at a time, so it's not like you get to call up a buffet menu of 30 different attack options in any given battle. But out of battle, back at the home base of Jubilife Village, you can have your creatures learn tons of different moves and then you can freely swap them in and out of their active arsenal at any time. No more fretting over which move a Pokémon will be forced to "forget" when a new one is learned – these monsters finally have good memories!

So you roam around in the wild hunting Pokémon, catching them to add them to the growing Pokédex, occasionally doing battle . . . and then you see it. A massive Pokémon. A huge beast, way bigger than others of its same species. And it's got glowing red eyes. And it sees you! And it's mad!!

Ladies and gentlemen, beware the Alpha Pokémon! Another wrinkle in the gameplay here is that some of the Pokémon you encounter in your travels are way larger, way stronger and way tougher to catch than the rest. Alpha Pokémon are big – some of them comically so – and their inclusion adds another great layer of fun to this adventure.

At first they're insurmountable obstacles impeding your progress – your tiny team of starting creatures can't match up to the Level 40 Alpha Rapidash you're likely to encounter early on. But then what a moment of triumph it is when you're able to come back to that same monster later on and actually beat it. Or better yet, actually *catch* it, adding its wild might to your team! Obtaining your first Alpha is a wonderful memory. Filling your team with them feels like victory!

But that's *still* not the full extent of how battles have been altered here in Pokémon Legends: Arceus. Over and above all of that, there are the boss battles you'll fight against Frenzied Pokémon.

There are only a handful of these encounters – one apiece in each of the five different areas of Hisui you'll explore – but they nevertheless leave a lasting impression. Mysterious lightning has struck important "Noble" Pokémon and sent each of them into an uncontrollable rage. It's up to you to go face-to-face with them and use your expert throwing arm not to toss Poké Balls at them, but rather to toss "Balms" (a.k.a. little bags of their favorite kinds of foods). Apparently the way to calm down a wild creature that's in a bad mood is to repeatedly bean it in the face with sacks of meatballs. (Beats me!)

The logic might not be so sound, but these Frenzied Pokémon battles end up being fun and feel epic in scale. I think they're here because the devs had the ball-tossing and dodge-rolling mechanics in place from the main gameplay and they wanted to come up with some scenario in which players' mastery of both those skills would be put to the test – since sneaking up on an oblivious Bidoof isn't exactly the most challenging or rewarding kind of accomplishment.

Let's talk story! The Frenzied fights are used as milestones to advance the plot, as the citizens of the Hisui region all struggle to understand why and how those mysterious lightning bolts struck from the sky. Not just the sky in general, though, but one specific point in it – a huge space-time rift has appeared in the center of the region, hovering in the air right over Mount Coronet. But it's not just lightning shooting out of that rift – your player character actually falls out of it too, right when the game begins!

We knew there were some kind of time travel shenanigans at work in the story here, since it takes place in the past but your character also has a modern smartphone in their possession. It turns out that it isn't just the phone that has tumbled back in time, but your actual character, and distrust about their sudden appearance out of nowhere fuels much of the story here.

The space-time rift also becomes a lightning rod for a conflict between the rival Diamond and Pearl Clans, both of whom think they've got the right idea when it comes to their religious worship of "almighty Sinnoh." The Diamond Clan thinks Sinnoh is in control of all time, while the Pearl Clan instead believes Sinnoh is a master of space. Any players coming into this game with knowledge of previous Pokémon titles will instantly recognize that both of them are wrong – the Diamond Clan is actually worshipping Dialga, while the Pearl Clan is praising Palkia. The true "Sinnoh" is neither of the two of them, but the titular Arceus itself!

It's kind of frustrating to have to sit through multiple cutscenes in which this argument plays out, since we already know both parties are in the wrong going in. A more interesting story might have focused its attention on a totally new Pokémon we've never met before, so that there could be a bit more mystery to how things would play out in the end.

But honestly, a lot of what brings the story down is how it's told, in regards to presentation. Pokémon Legends: Arceus has no voice acting. Its cutscenes are also frequently overly long, to the point of boredom – I played a lot of the game with my kids watching me and would read the dialogue aloud to them, but after several minutes of that they'd be getting anxious to move on and I would be too, so we ended up mashing through a bunch of text boxes just to get back to the actual action of playing the game. Future games either need to introduce voice acting to make these scenes more interesting to watch, or else they need to cut the fat and streamline the story, hacking off at least half of the volume of text seen here.

We're in critiquing territory now, so let's address the biggest shortcoming in this adventure: the visuals. This is not the best-looking video game.

Pokémon video games have never measured up visually when compared to their contemporaries from other franchises – they've been behind the curve, again, ever since they got their start on the monochrome old Game Boy at the same time that console gaming was going full 3D. Pokémon Legends: Arceus likewise lags behind the likes of even the five-year-old Breath of the Wild in how it struggles to render its open world.

The problems aren't as apparent early on, when you're slowly crawling through grass patches in the adventure's early hours. But when you later gain access to faster methods of travel like the quick-running Ride Pokémon Wyrdeer or the high-flying Braviary, the visual flaws are flung right into your face like a sack full of meatballs. Pop-in is egregious, as the environment looks like a total mess when you're dashing through it at Wyrdeer's top speed or soaring above it with Braviary's fastest flaps. Pokémon who appear too far away in the distance from your current location animate with a distracting lowly framerate. Ugly white artifacting appears around your character when you step inside interior areas like caves. It's a mess.

And yet the game is simultaneously oddly beautiful! The painterly art style comes across well, and big moments like the boss battles or battles against multiple opponents at the same time are positively striking. The Pokémon all animate better than ever, too, both in battle and when they're in the wild. Sometimes you'll stumble across Pokémon taking a nap, or joking around with you as you get close to them. At one point I climbed to the top of a mountain and there was a lonely Machoke up there sitting on the edge of a cliff with its legs dangling off the side, just chilling, taking in the view and contemplating its life. That was really cool to see.

So the artistry is there – Game Freak has the power to create visually interesting moments. They just need to keep making progress on their technical aptitude, because they just get so outclassed when their games are held up in comparison to any other company's efforts. (And that's just among the Switch library – don't even try to put a release like this alongside the visuals of games launching on other platforms like the PS5 or Xbox Series X.)

OK, I've done my duty as a reviewer and properly dragged the graphics of Pokémon Legends: Arceus. Luckily – and I think millions of early-adopting players have discovered this already – you don't need to have 100% perfect graphics in a game in order to have a perfectly pleasant time playing it.

This game is wildly fun, despite its flaws. The feeling of fully exploring each section of Hisui is exhilirating – you never know what kind of Pokémon or what interesting kind of environment you'll stumble across next. The quest to "catch 'em all" and actually fully fill out the Pokédex is more engaging than it's ever been, too. I don't think I've ever come close to full Pokédex completion in any of the past games, but as of this writing I think I have just 20 Pokémon left to catalog in Legends: Arceus, and I feel like I've got enough motivation left to finish the job! And that's especially surprising to me since most of these 'mons are returning from old games, and I've never felt motivated to catch returning monsters in Pokémon games before.

I guess Arceus has worked its magic on me! This really does feel like a big step forward for a series that famously plays things safe, and I'm excited to see where the franchise will go next!
– LUCAS

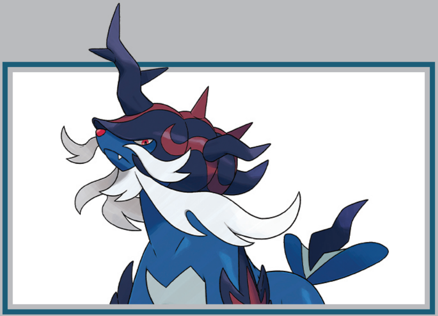
9.0

HISUIAN DECIDUEYE

As was heavily rumored, the three starters in Pokémon Legends: Arceus do indeed have different final forms than in their first games. Rowlet grows to become this new take on Decidueye, a Grass/Fighting wandering warrior who attacks with both arrows and flying kicks!

HISUIAN TYPHLOSION

The explosively angry pure Fire-type Typhlosion we first met all the way back in Pokémon Gold & Silver has been supplanted by this much more mellow version in Hisui. Now a Fire/Ghost-type, this Typhlosion serves as a spirit guide and can attack its foes with spectral flames!



HISUIAN SAMUROTT

The least changed of the starter trio, Samurott still looks a lot like it did when it was first introduced in the Unova region games. In Hisui, though, it's got a darker color scheme to match its new Water/Dark type combo – and it's a much meaner samurai than it used to be!

NEW FAVORITES FROM HISUI!

Pokémon Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl introduced exactly zero new Pokémon to catch. Not even a new form for any of the existing creatures! And while I thought that was a bad call a couple of months ago, I do now recognize that keeping that pair of remakes totally locked to the Pokédex of the past set the stage for the Hisui region's collection of critters to seem all the more original and interesting. Pokémon Legends: Arceus has now officially pushed the series over the 900 mark in terms of numbered Pokémon in the ever-growing 'Dex, while continuing to revisit older generations' monsters with fresh new regional variants that change up their original looks. Here are some more of the new faces!

URSALUNA

The Teddiursa/Ursaring evolution line has remained the same for decades, but it's finally been revisited in Pokémon Legends: Arceus! Ursaring can now evolve into this new Ground/Normal 'mon that also serves as a scent-seeking Ride Pokémon during the game's story.

SNEASLER

Another unexpected new evolution, Sneasler evolves from a never-before-seen Fighting/Poison variant of Sneasel found only in Hisui. With its lanky body and long claws, Sneasler also works as a Ride Pokémon to carry your character up walls too steep for you to scale!

HISUIAN LILLIGANT

Back in Pokémon Black & White, Lilligant debuted as a pure Grass-type with a bulky dress of petals and a heavy flowered crown. In Hisui, Lilligants are lighter on their feet, not weighed down with so much foliage. As a result, they've become Grass/Fighting-types!

OVERQWIL

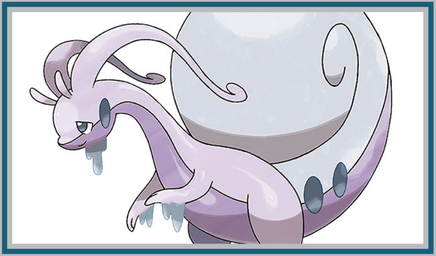
My personal favorite new Pokémon! Qwilfish was one of those almost entirely forgettable Gen II monsters – it never made much of an impression on anyone. In Hisui, though, Qwilfish are now Dark/Poison and they can evolve into this new menace with an incredible name!

HISUIAN ELECTRODE

We showed you Hisuian Voltorb in our last issue, noting its cheerful demeanor compared to its original form. But something seems to have gone wrong when it evolved! Hisuian Electrode is right back to looking mad. Maybe it doesn't like being Electric/Grass after all?

HISUIAN ARCANINE

The incredibly pet-worthy puppy Hisuian Growlithe grows up to become this great-looking doggo! The extra floof and fur it had as a Growlithe has only grown further, turning into a billowing tail and a mighty mane. It remains a Fire/Rock-type after evolving, and its new spiked noggin is powerfully piercing in battle!



HISUIAN GOODRA

Goodra showed up for the first time in Pokémon X & Y, and its design was originally meant to be inspired by snails – that didn't really come through very obviously in its final look, though. Now the inspiration is more apparent, as Hisuian Goodras have a huge snail shell and a new extra-defensive type combo: Steel/Dragon!

HISUIAN AVALUGG

Finally, the Hisui region's version of Avalugg is not very different body-wise from its original appearance in the Kalos region games – but its brand-new faceplates give it an extra boost to its intimidation factor! Now an Ice/Rock-type, this Avalugg is the star of what is the best, most epic boss battle in the game. Beware its might!

Is This Wiimake Wiik or Wiinderful?

SONIC COLORS: ULTIMATE

THE ORIGINAL SONIC COLORS for Wii is a well-respected game. After playing this remake, though, I'm struggling to figure out why.

If you were on the internet around the time this game launched last year, you're likely familiar with stories of countless game-breaking glitches and bugs, as well as the Sonic fandom's loud complaints that this Switch port specifically is unforgivably broken. Those reports and reproaches aren't entirely unfounded, but they've been blown way out of proportion. I didn't experience too many bugs, but it wasn't performance issues that left me feeling ultimately unimpressed.

Colors plays out as a hybrid of 2D and 3D Sonic. Sometimes you're navigating a 3D space via an exciting behind-the-hedgehog view, and other times the camera whips around for some classic Sonic sidescrolling.

The setting is fantastic, taking place in a delightfully garish outer space theme park. It's there that Sonic and Tails meet the Wisps, an alien race that Eggman is using to power his evil designs for universal conquest, and who also happen to grant Sonic time-limited superpowers. These include a drill power that allows you to burrow through the ground, a ghost power that lets you teleport and a whole lot more – they provide an excellent gameplay hook, and really open up some clever moments.

So, on paper, everything about Sonic Colors is great. It's full of fantastic visual design, enjoyable music, awesome power-ups, a fun story and a well-thought-out balance between 3D and 2D gameplay. In practice, though, the game just can't manage to be very much fun.

It seems to be designed around the idea that you'll want to master every stage through repeat play. The trouble is that the actual game mechanics suck every last ounce of joy out of the experience, leaving you with little incentive to play any stage more than once, let alone at all.

Still, there are often brief glimpses of greatness when things do manage to gel together, which is proof that the end concept they were going for is a sound one. When you're zipping along sliding through tight spaces and using your homing jump on baddies and floating springs, Sonic Colors can be truly exhilarating! But most of the time the game just grinds to a halt while you stand there trying to figure out what it was the developers wanted you to do. Or worse, when precision platforming rears its ugly head.

2D Sonic games work as well as they do because of refined controls. The original Genesis games, the Advance trilogy, Rush, Mania – these games' jumping physics may not always be the same, but the games built around them are always tailored to their inherent strengths and weaknesses, and they're sharp enough to reward players who can master them. The jump physics in Colors seem to be focused on forward momentum only, which again is great when you're successfully rolling around at the speed of sound, but it also makes many of the most basic jumps a complete pain.

Platforms are often placed right at the apex of Sonic's arc, so it's way too easy to miss important jumps. And the double jump adds very little to his vertical reach – for example, you may be trying to make a specific jump where the wall is just *barely* too tall to make it over, and Sonic will perform an unintended wall jump that launches you straight to your death. Or you'll go to hit your double jump and Sonic will home in on a nearby switch that's across the screen in the wrong direction. It's as infuriating as it is deflating, because this game *could* be so good!

Everything about Sonic Colors should work, but like so many 3D Sonic games before it, its ultimate potential remains just out of reach. There's fun to be had, and the high points are incredibly cool, but the shoddy gameplay boils the entire thing down to a surprisingly mediocre experience that's tragically unworthy of what this concept deserves.

Whether that would have still been my opinion if I'd first played the Wii version over a decade ago . . . who can say? **– KRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: BLIND SQUIRREL GAMES RATING: E

5.0

Forget Your Regrets

THE CALIGULA EFFECT 2

I DON'T THINK I've ever played a game that uses music and its ability to provide an escape quite like The Caligula Effect 2.

Since this JRPG's soundtrack is one of its strongest elements, it works really well. It's full of catchy, electro-pop earworms that wouldn't leave my head! Not only that, the music plays a central role in the game's systems and story. Specific songs are tied to bosses, combat and dungeons, and it fuels the overall premise.

The Caligula Effect 2 takes place in the virtual world of Redo, created by a vocaloid idol named Regret. If you enjoy her music and experience regret, you're transported to Redo to live your ideal life and are none the wiser. That's where the protagonist and main cast find themselves until another vocaloid named χ (that's the Greek letter "Chi") reveals the truth, and they form the Go-Home Club to combat Regret.

The story isn't anything special compared to other JRPGs with modern settings. It's also mostly the same as the first Caligula Effect, though playing that game isn't required to understand the sequel. However, The Caligula Effect 2's strong cast of characters made the experience worthwhile.

That's because each character in Redo isn't who they appear to be! The Go-Home Club is comprised of characters who all look like high school students. In reality, most of them aren't and have regrets that transported them to Redo in the first place.

As you get to know the club members through Bond Episodes, you discover who they really are, and the reveals are emotional. I won't spoil any details from these moments, but I was surprised at how much I felt for these characters once I truly knew them.

The game's combat is another strong point. Its turn-based system, called the Imaginary Chain, is built upon executing abilities and moving out of harm's way at the right time. It allows you to see how your abilities and enemy actions will play out before you finalize your decisions.

You can also adjust the timing of your abilities, which lets you pull off counters and follow-up moves at just the right moment. It took some trial and error to learn this system, but as I played more and leveled up the characters, it became really fun. I ultimately got so skilled that I could counter attacks, launch enemies into the air and knock them out before they even hit the ground!

With great music, characters and combat, The Caligula Effect 2 checks several boxes for a solid JRPG — but it sorely lacks in one area: side content. There is such a thing as too many side-quests, and that's the problem here.

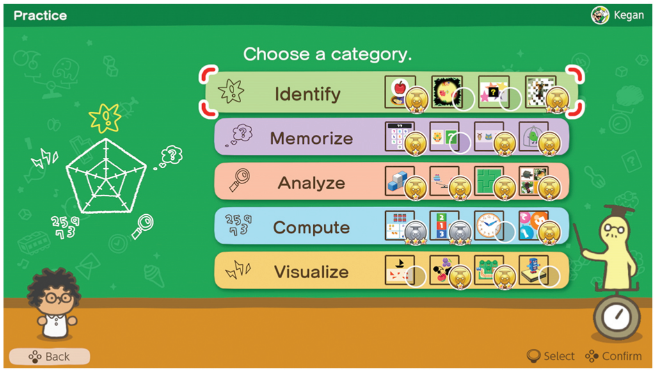
The game compiles them in a massive info web called the Causality Link. As you complete quests, more unlock, and then there's more and more and more! Most of them involve delivering items or talking to people while equipping a certain accessory. Because of this, they weren't rewarding, and sometimes, the quest givers weren't in the place they were said to be via the Causality Link.

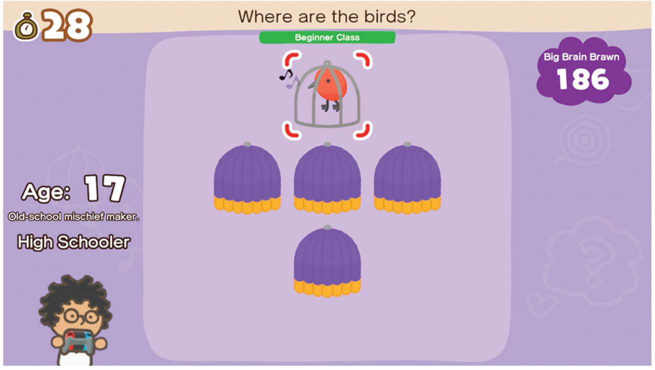
I also can't recommend the Switch as the ideal platform for this game, especially if you play in Handheld Mode. It's serviceable in TV Mode, but in Handheld Mode it's blurry and out of focus. I couldn't stand to play it that way for long. This is a trend I keep seeing with Switch ports from NIS America, so I hope they can get it figured out.

I think The Caligula Effect 2 will provide a fun experience for fans of the first game and JRPG fans in general. But for those new to the genre, you can find better ones on the Switch that may leave you with fewer regrets. **— MAGGIE**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: FURYU RATING: T





Build Your Brain on a Budget

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY: BRAIN VS. BRAIN

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY may not be a big name like Mario or Zelda, but under the right circumstances, owning Nintendo's latest brain trainer can be just as essential as Mario Kart itself.

Big Brain Academy: Brain vs. Brain takes the tried-and-true formula established in its series' first two entries and applies a new focus on head-to-head competition. If you're a newcomer to the Academy titles, they offer a set of brain-teasing minigames that focus on different styles of thinking – there's pattern recognition, basic math skills, that kind of stuff. Each game presents you with a challenge, and you do your best to solve it as quickly as possible. Simple as that.

Unlike more buttoned-down affairs like the venerable Brain Age series, Big Brain Academy is chock-full of colorful personality and focuses more on striking a balance between brain training and fun. Challenges are presented with a delightful art style that's both appealing and easy to read for players of all ages.

Speaking of all ages, its ability to work for everyone is easily one of its biggest strengths. Given the basic premise of the game, you might think that playing it with different age groups would quickly become an exercise in frustration. But that's fortunately not the case! Each player can set their own difficulty level, including something called "Sprout Class," which is perfect for younger players. With such a huge range of options, you can have an actual even match with players on vastly different skill levels.

My wife and I play this regularly against our 8-year-old and 5-year-old, and unlike in Mario Kart where we more or less have to sometimes let them win to keep things seeming "fair," this presents a legitimately even matchup, which is a feature I can't praise enough.

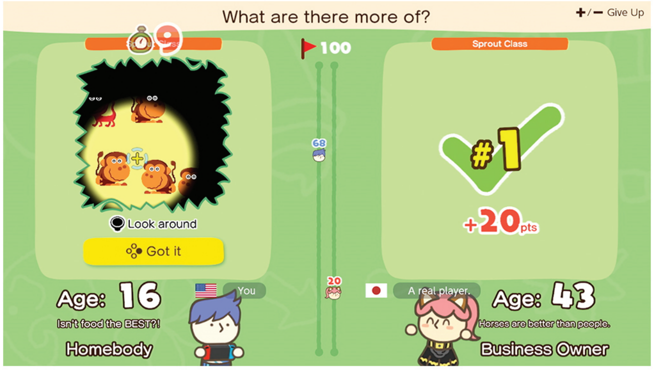
While the primary focus of Brain vs. Brain is multiplayer, that doesn't mean there isn't anything for solo players to do. Naturally, you can jump in and practice any of the 20 minigames to try and improve your skills. Whenever you're ready, you can also give yourself a test to see how that practice is paying off. Doing so will net you a number of unlockables, including new outfits for your adorable avatars. Unlike in other multiplayer titles like Clubhouse Games, these can be linked to a system profile so nobody in your house has to register as a "guest" when you play. That's another nice feature for families.

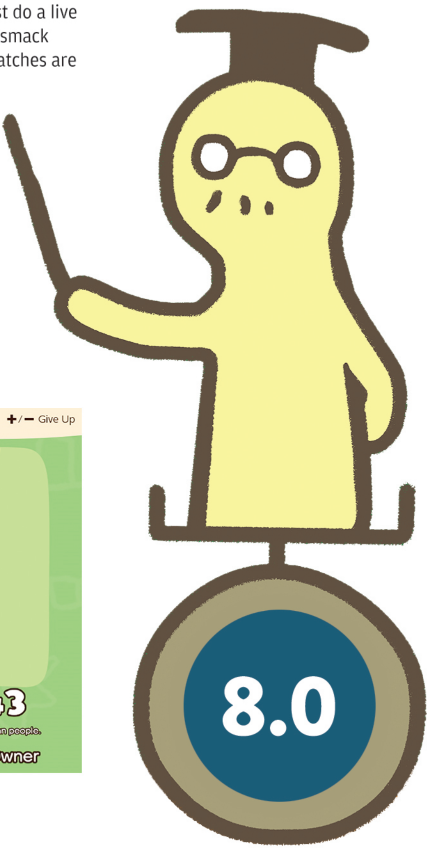
Then there's Ghost Clash. This is a sort-of online mode, but it's not exactly live. You can connect to the internet and play against existing recorded ghost data from friends or strangers around the world. Since there aren't really any variables during gameplay, everyone effectively has the same experience no matter when they play, so you're ultimately just competing for speed. This makes it possible to challenge your friends online without having to actually be logged on at the same time. Of course, this also means you can't just do a live online match with real-time smack talk, but still, these ghost matches are a nice compromise.

And, well, that's pretty much it. Overall the package is a bit light on content, but I can't say that's necessarily a bad thing in this instance. Big Brain Academy doesn't do a whole lot, but what it does, it does very well, making it easy to recommend.

Depending on how much you enjoy pushing yourself, the fun of Big Brain Academy may wear thin relatively quickly for solo players, but if you're in a situation where you can play with others locally – like quarantining at home with your spouse and kids for nearly a full two years now – Big Brain Academy is an absolute must-buy.

Also, it's cheap! $29.99! **– KRIS**

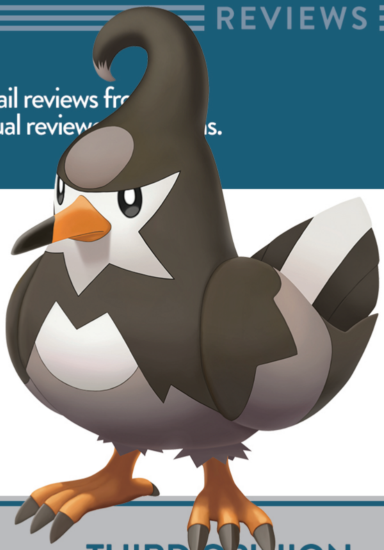




SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews fr
the last two years. Scores reflect individual review s.



SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Alex Kidd in Miracle World DX	7.5	David	#54
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Ary and the Secret of Seasons	6.0	Lucas	#49
Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & the Secret Fairy	8.0	Maggie	#51
Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia	6.5	Lucas	#51
Balan Wonderworld	5.0	Lucas	#52
Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night	7.5	Tony	#48
Blue Reflection: Second Light	8.5	Maggie	#57
Bravely Default II	9.0	Nadia	#52
Catherine: Full Body	8.5	Jonathan	#49
Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics	8.5	Lucas	#48
Cobra Kai: The Karate Kid Saga Continues	6.5	Kris	#50
Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time!	8.5	David	#52
Cris Tales	6.5	Maggie	#57
Cruis'n Blast	8.0	David	#56
DC Super Hero Girls: Teen Power	7.0	Kris	#53
Deadly Premonition 2: A Blessing in Disguise	7.0	Jonathan	#49
Doki Doki Literature Club Plus!	8.5	Rebecca	#55
Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot	6.0	Kris	#56
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
G.I. Joe: Operation Blackout	6.5	Lucas	#54
Heroland	7.0	Rebecca	#45
Hot Wheels Unleashed	7.5	Lucas	#56
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity	8.5	Tony	#50
Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure!	5.0	Chris	#45
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
John Wick Hex	7.5	Chris	#51
Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory	7.0	Tony	#50
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy	8.5	Brett	#45
Mario Golf: Super Rush	9.0	Lucas	#54
Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit	9.5	Lucas	#49
Mario Party Superstars	8.5	Lucas	#57
Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection	9.0	David	#45
Metroid Dread	9.0	Tony	#56
Miitopia	7.5	Brett	#53
Monster Hunter Rise	9.0	Lucas	#52
Monster Hunter Stories 2: Wings of Ruin	9.0	Maggie	#54
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
NEO: The World Ends with You	8.0	Rebecca	#55
NERF Legends	4.0	Lucas	#57
New Pokémon Snap	9.0	Lucas	#53
Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom – Prince's Edition	8.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl	7.5	Brett	#56
Nickelodeon Kart Racers 2: Grand Prix	7.0	David	#50
No More Heroes III	9.5	Jonathan	#55
Paper Mario: The Origami King	8.5	Brett	#48
Paw Patrol Mighty Pups: Save Adventure Bay!	8.5	Lucas	#51
Persona 5 Strikers	9.0	Maggie	#52
Pikmin 3 Deluxe	9.5	Lucas	#50
Pokémon Brilliant Diamond	6.5	Rebecca	#57
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shining Pearl	6.0	Lucas	#57
Puyo Puyo Tetris 2	8.5	Rebecca	#50
R-Type Final 2	7.5	Jonathan	#53
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin	8.5	Lucas	#50
Shadowverse: Champion's Battle	8.0	Maggie	#55
Shin Megami Tensei V	8.0	Meghan	#57
Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl – Gold	6.0	Brett	#45
Story of Seasons: Friends of Mineral Town	7.5	Rebecca	#48
Story of Seasons: Pioneers of Olive Town	6.5	Rebecca	#53
Super Mario 3D All-Stars	7.0	Lucas	#49
Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury	10	Lucas	#51
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania	8.5	David	#56
The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles	9.0	Rebecca	#54
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel III	9.0	Maggie	#49
The Legend of Heroes: Trails of Cold Steel IV	9.0	Maggie	#52
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword HD	9.0	Lucas	#54
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Transformers: Battlegrounds	7.5	Lucas	#54
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
WarioWare: Get It Together!	7.5	Rebecca	#56
World's End Club	6.5	Kris	#55
Xenoblade Chronicles: Definitive Edition	10	Lucas	#48
Ys IX: Monstrum Nox	9.0	Lucas	#55

THIRD OPINION

POKÉMON BRILLIANT DIAMOND & SHINING PEARL

MY DAD AND Rebecca both didn't like Pokémon Brilliant Diamond & Shining Pearl so much, but I had a lot of fun. I played Brilliant Diamond and I want to tell you about my journey!

I started with Turtwig. I named my rival Hop, and in one hour I had beaten him. I caught a Starly, a Bidoof and a Geodude, and with them and Turtwig, I beat Roark. When I got back to Jubilife City, I encountered Team Galactic. I beat them, then went to Floaroma Town. A little girl wanted her Papa back, so I solved a puzzle and beat Commander Mars.

By then I had Staravia and Jirachi on my team. I beat the whole Eterna Gym with only Staravia, and solved another puzzle to get to Veilstone City. I found myself stuck with Maylene's Lucario, but a Houndoom from the Grand Underground solved that problem! The fourth, fifth and sixth Gyms were hard – Wake beat me once, and Fantina nearly defeated me. But Byron was OK.

Then Lake Valor exploded! It was the work of Commander Saturn, who I beat, and then I checked on Lake Verity and Lake Acuity. I beat Candice in the process. After that I went to Team Galactic HQ to save Uxie, Mesprit and Azelf. I beat Cyrus there, then saved them. Then I went to Mount Coronet to stop Cyrus again, and I caught Dialga! Then I caught Azelf!

I beat Volkner, found my way through Victory Road, did a Hop battle and got to the Pokémon League. I battled Aaron, Bertha, Flint, Lucian, Aaron, Bertha, Flint, Lucian and Cynthia. (I lost the first time to Lucian.) Then I did lots of training, and I became the Champion of Sinnoh with Torterra, Staravia, Rapidash, Graveler, Dialga and Azelf! Hooray!

Now I just need to find Mesprit! **– CARTER**

6.5 REBECCA

6.0 LUCAS

8.5 CARTER

FAN GAME IN DEVELOPMENT

Castlevania: Seal of the Eclipse

Which will be destroyed first: Dracula, or this game's chance to actually be released?

AN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED apocalypse story works as both an ending and a beginning. Maybe that's why so many "on the brink of the end of the world" games like YIIK I.V (see Page 17) and Castlevania: Seal of the Eclipse take place in 1999. That fateful year served as a sunset for the past, while leaving us in the dark about the future.

Seal of the Eclipse tells a story that evokes that same sense of limbo, where the final battle against Dracula will either bring about the end of mankind or put the final nail in Drac's coffin for good. This "Demon Castle War" has been referenced in the official Castlevania timeline for years, and thanks to fan developers Dracula9 and ThePlotTwist, we're finally going to get to play it out for ourselves.

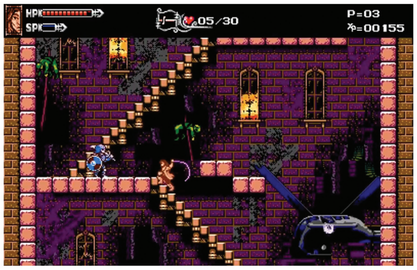
Seal of the Eclipse stars four characters: Julius Belmont (the heir to the famous vampire hunting family), Adrian Fahrenheit Tepes (also known as Alucard, Son of Dracula), Lenora Belnades (a magic-using descendent of Sypha Belnades from Castlevania III) and Timothy Danasty (a mysterious descendent of Grant Danasty, also from Castlevania III). While they all sound like "real" Castlevania characters, half of them are actually fan creations. This mix of new and old, canon and fan-fiction, classic and modern falls right in line with the game's overall theme.

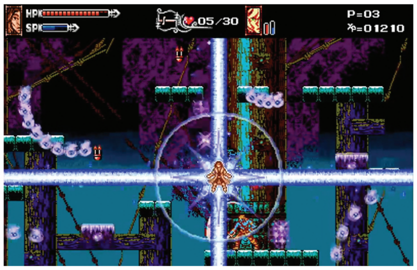
In one scene, Alucard argues with his old family business partner Death, just as he did in Symphony of the Night. In the next, Lenora jumps on an army truck as she battles ghosts in a burnt-out 20th century village. From the looks of it, Seal of the Eclipse will swing between throwbacks to Castlevanias gone by and terrific new twists at every turn.

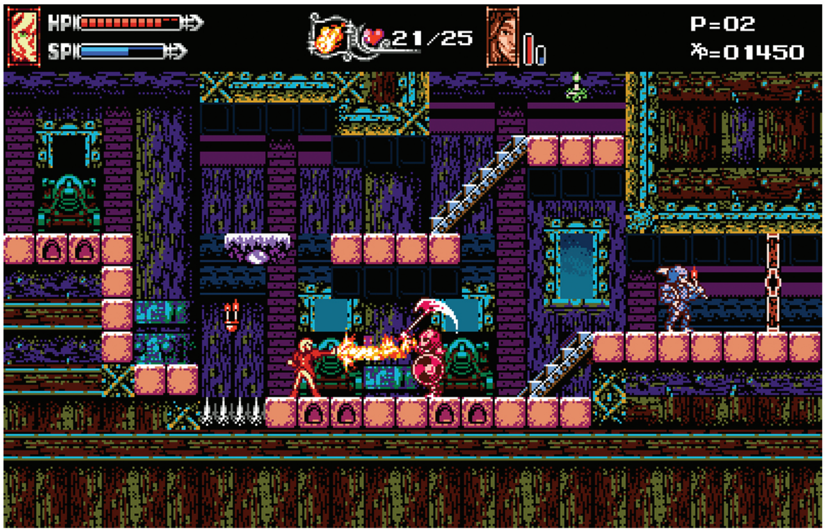
And the game isn't just about "passing the torch" between Komani's official 'Vania games and unofficial ones – it also marks a shift in the dev team's goals and expectations. Seal of the Eclipse actually started off as a 32-bit-looking fan game called Castlevania: Umbra of Sorrow. After toiling away on it for years, and with no potential to turn a profit, the team decided to "demake" Umbra in the style of Bloodstained: Curse of the Moon. That's Seal of the Eclipse, and frankly, pivoting to a self-imposed down-port was the smartest move the team could have made. Despite looking very impressive, Umbra never made headlines, while Seal's debut trailer already has over 150,000 views on YouTube. That classic NES Castlevania feel, complete with signature "Belmont-limp" walk cycle, just hits fans different. Bringing it back from the dead with a few new bells and whistles was a shrewd move.

Shrewd or not, working on a fan game is always a risky prospect. Will all this attention get the game killed off by Castlevania's brand owners? So far so good, but we'll be watching this one with bated breath. Not long ago, Konami held a "pitch us your ideas" contest for indie devs, giving them a chance to work on one of the publisher's classic franchises. If only Seal had entered and won! Then we could just pre-order it in peace. Instead, we'll have to wait through a few restless nights before this one sees the light of day – assuming that day ever comes. **– JONATHAN**

@demoncastlewar







FAN GAME NOT IN DEVELOPMENT

MOTHER 3 TRIBUTE

Another agonizingly amazing concept of what Nintendo could do (if they wanted to).

ARTISTS OF THE world, a message: You're really not making my life any easier.

A big part of being a Nintendo fan for decades on end is holding a hope in your heart for certain games to be announced that you know in your head have nearly no chance of actually being announced. An official localization of Mother 3 has been the holy grail for many for years now – its incredible fan translation has ensured that anyone who wants to experience its story has an avenue to do so, but fans still dream and pray that Nintendo of America would acknowledge the game and release it for sale as a legitimate product.

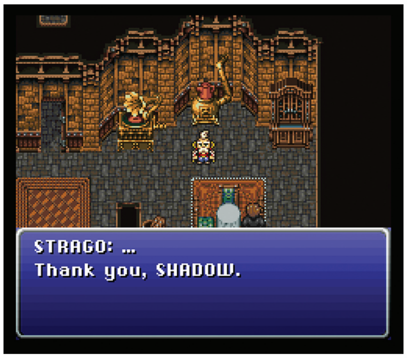
That's probably never going to happen, so it seems self-destructive to keep on hoping for it. But you know what is even more psychically damaging? Hoping for a fully 3D Mother 3 remake instead!

The Curiomatic team of Omni Jacala, Sean Hicks and Chris Szczesiul, alongside two dozen or so contributing artists, have poisoned my mind with the glorious impossibility of the version of Mother 3 pictured here on this page. (My apologies for infecting you as well.) Over the past few years, this team worked diligently to craft their vision of a modern Mother 3 remake and assembled a fake reveal trailer like we might see in a Nintendo Direct.

It's too good. Honestly, how can something make you simultaneously so happy and so sad? We're talking *detail* here, people. The team painstakingly modeled dozens of environments and characters in 3D and restaged several key scenes from the story of the game, cutting back and forth between them so quickly that it's almost impossible to appreciate the fact that each segment of just a second or two probably took multiple months to assemble.

You don't have to take my word for it, though – visit the Mother 3 Tribute website to send your own jaw to the floor. You'll be among hundreds of thousands of fans who've seen it . . . including Mother series creator Shigesato Itoi, who praised it on Twitter! Dare we hope this motivates him to take action!? (Probably best not to.) **– LUCAS**

Mother3Tribute.com



ROM HACK & FAN TRANSLATION

Final Fantasy VI T-Edition

A fan in Japan expanded the SNES classic, then Mato brought his effort into English!

WHILE RETRO GAMING aficionados often seek the most authentic means to play classic wares – i.e. running on original hardware hooked up to a CRT display – sometimes the original experience isn't the most ideal. Ports and updates add bug fixes, quality-of-life improvements and fresh content, culminating in a "definitive edition" that can be enjoyed by generations to come.

Square Enix never got that memo, as re-releases from their back catalog tend to remove just as much as they add. Consider Final Fantasy VI: You could select the original SNES release with its censorship and liberal localization. Then there's the PlayStation version, which adds FMV sequences but introduces slowdown. Then you've got the Game Boy Advance edition, introducing new dungeons and a more faithful translation at the cost of inferior sound quality. And Steam is just about to welcome the Final Fantasy VI Pixel Remaster as of this writing, but who's to say that it too won't be compromised in some fashion.

As usual, it's up to the fan hacking community to assemble their ideal "director's cut," and there's no more elaborate and feature-rich iteration of Final Fantasy VI than Tsushiy's T-Edition! While this conversion retains the original FFVI story with all its twists and turns, it overhauls equipment, abilities, spells and general combat mechanics while also greatly expanding the side content with new quest lines and boss encounters. The overall challenge is a bit higher than the vanilla build, but the wild changes offer a more rewarding experience for old fans as well as newcomers to this chapter.

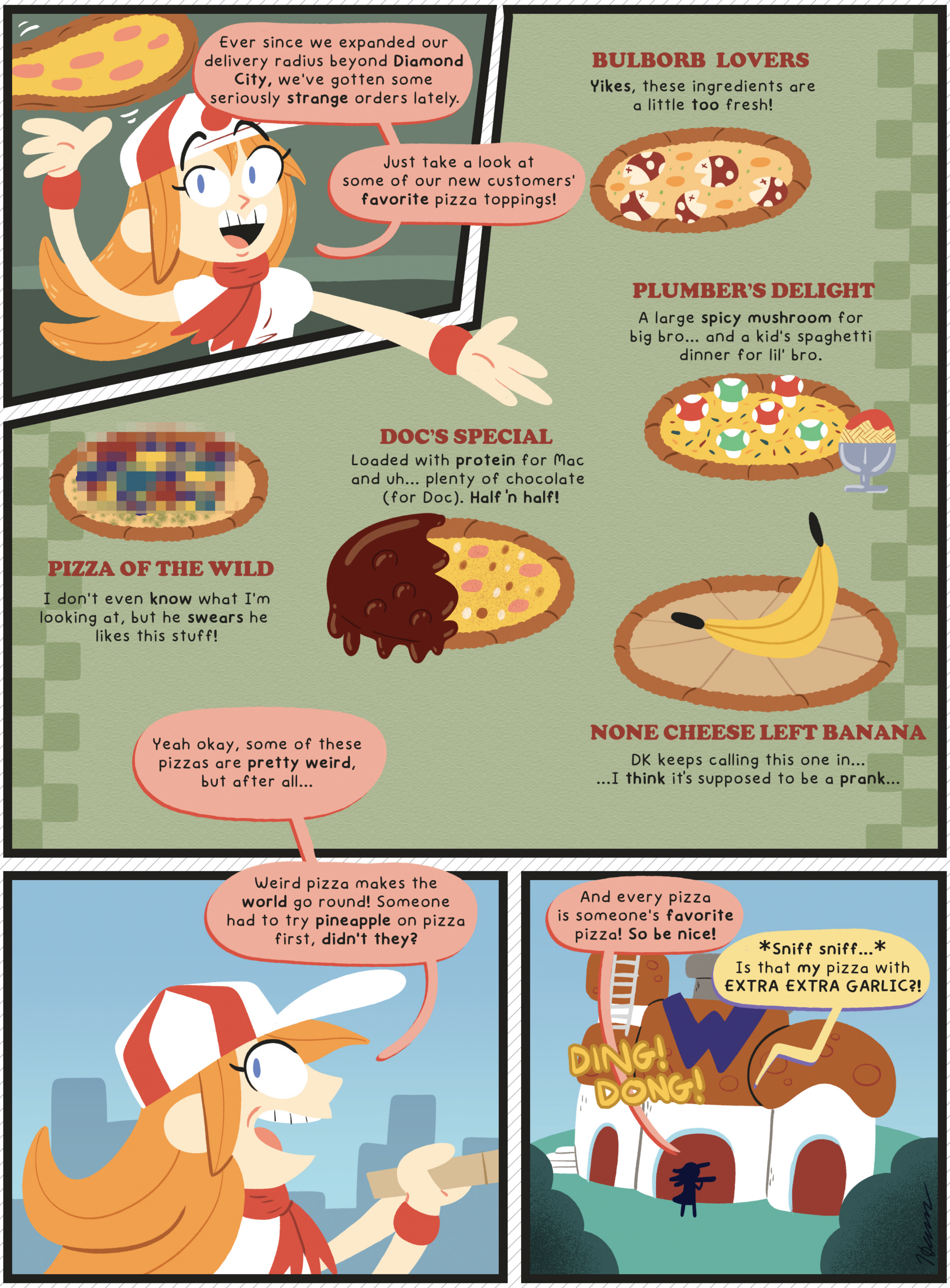
Final Fantasy VI T-Edition is also a celebration of the entire franchise, incorporating an avalanche of music and enemies from past and future entries, from the NES progenitor all the way through XIII-2! That means you'll get to enjoy 16-bit confrontations against Cloud of Darkness, Sephiroth, Ultimecia and more, then jam out to Final Fantasy-adjacent soundtrack selections from Chrono Trigger, Bravely Default and even the non-Square Xenoblade Chronicles, because why not!?

However, this massive overhaul has long been locked behind a nigh-impenetrable wall of ornate runes, decipherable only to those versed in the Eastern tongue. That is, until November 14, 2021, when an English patch was uploaded graciously by the localization wizard Clyde "Tomato" Mandelin, best known for translating a little-known indie gem called Mother 3! To save himself a bit of time and effort, he reused the FFVI Game Boy Advance script for all pieces of unaltered text from the base title, but all-new dialogue bears his seasoned touch.

Now, I know you're itching to scoop up the patch and apply it to that – *ahem!* – legally dumped ROM of the U.S.-published Final Fantasy III cartridge that you 100% own, but it's not that simple. Since T-Edition is a modification of Final Fantasy VI for Super Famicom, you'll need to obtain a clean ROM of the original 1.0 Japanese version. The resulting patched file is a temperamental child held together by hope and prayer, requiring further steps to run properly. Specifically, you're restricted to the Snes9x emulator – other emulators and even original hardware can work, though aren't ideal – with music fixes applied so that the audio doesn't crackle every three seconds.

But if you can jump through all the hoops and have several dozen hours to invest in a return trip to the Worlds of Balance and Ruin, you'll find Final Fantasy VI T-Edition is the best, most complete way to savor this RPG masterpiece. **– TONY**

tomato.fobby.net/ff6-t-edition



BY JOHN-CHARLES HOLMES

NEXT ISSUE

After a 15-year hiatus, the Mario Strikers series is about to strike back with an all-new sequel on the Switch! This electrifying pseudo-soccer spectacle made a major impression on the minds of players of its first two installments back in the GameCube and Wii days, and we've got no doubt that **Mario Strikers: Battle League** will live up to their legacy.

In fact, we'll just go ahead and take the opportunity afforded by its June release date to give our upcoming May/June issue a whole vibe of athletic appreciation. We'll also have **MLB The Show 22** and the new **Nintendo Switch Sports** to talk about as well, after all, so we'll assemble a whole sports spectacular to support their release too!

We'll also bring you our review of **Kirby and the Forgotten Land** to follow up on this issue, finally enlist in **Re-Boot Camp** and more. Don't miss NF #59!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #59:

MARIO STRIKERS: BATTLE LEAGUE

MLB THE SHOW 22

NINTENDO SWITCH SPORTS

KIRBY AND THE FORGOTTEN LAND

SPLATOON 3

ADVANCE WARS 1+2: RE-BOOT CAMP

TRIANGLE STRATEGY

RUNE FACTORY 5

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 3

FIRE EMBLEM WARRIORS: THREE HOPES

13 SENTINELS: AEGIS RIM

CHOCOBO GP

SEA OF STARS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE: BOOSTER COURSE PASS

AND MUCH **MORE!**

MAY/ JUNE 2022

RETURN TO DREAM LAND!

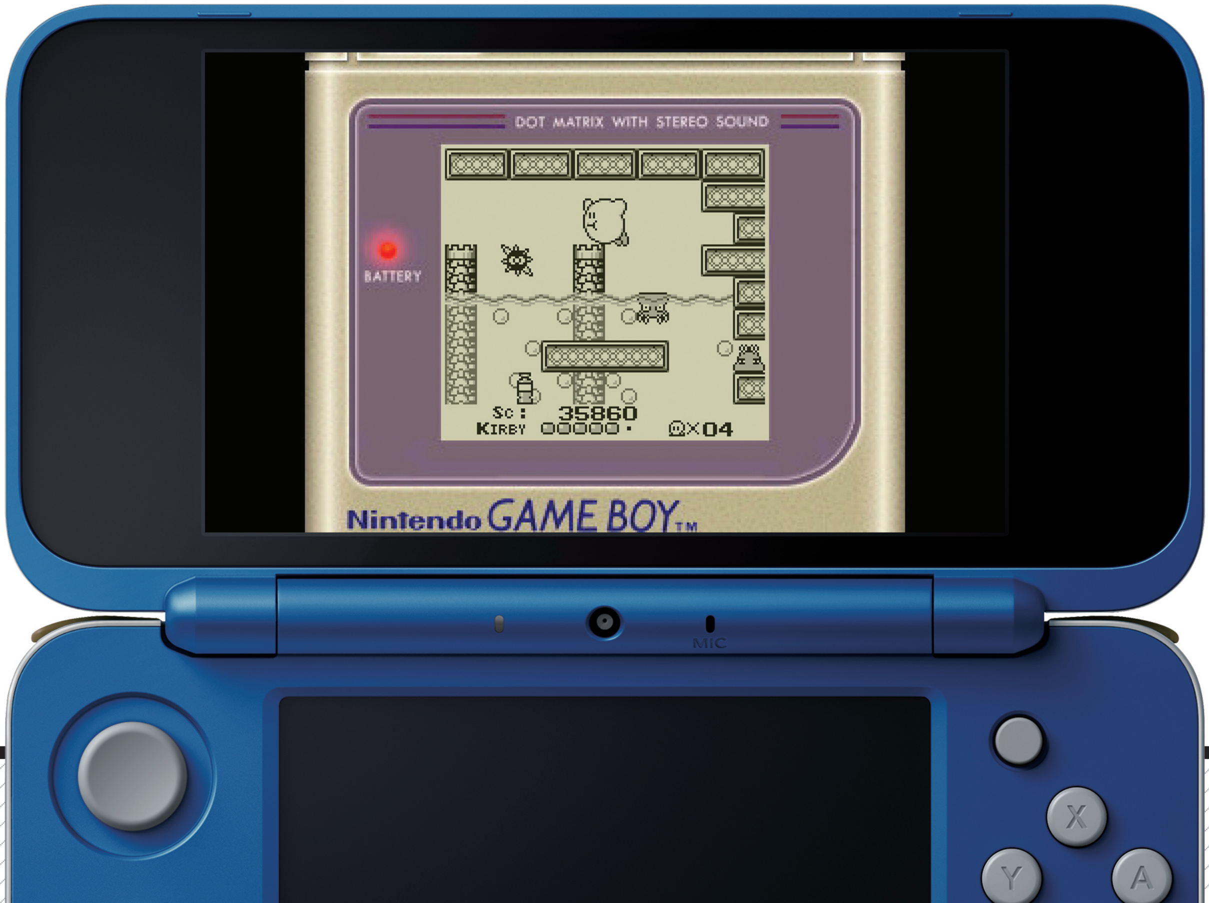
READY FOR ANOTHER retro recommendation?

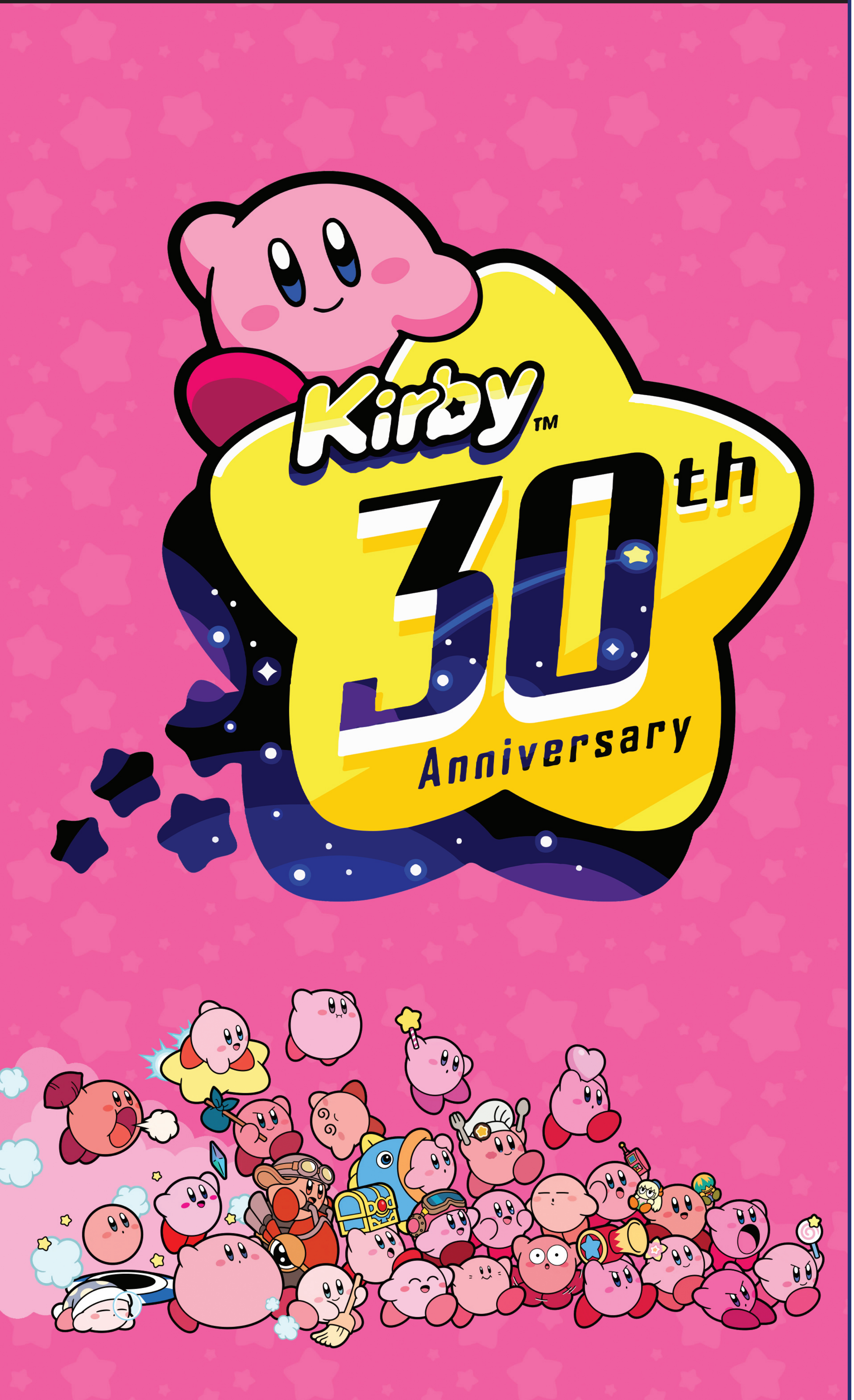
Previously I've used this page to propose that you play games like the original Legend of Zelda and the first Super Mario Bros., in order to better appreciate the beginnings of those long-running series. Well, I'm mentally back on that same page again with this suggestion: Seek out and play Kirby's Dream Land!

Kirby's officially turning 30 on April 27 this year, and that's because that date marks the 30th anniversary of the release of his first game in Japan. Kirby's Dream Land is a Game Boy classic, and it's a game that's still so charming and approachable today that I think players of all ages should go back to it to enjoy it!

That's easier said than done, though. The rumor that Game Boy games would be added to the Nintendo Switch Online subscription service has not yet come true – Game Boy got leapfrogged by both the Nintendo 64 and Sega Genesis for that honor – so you can't play Kirby's Dream Land on your Switch. (Not yet, at least.) That means its still-most-accessible re-release is in the 3DS eShop: the $3.99 Virtual Console version. That's a steal, so long as you still have an active 3DS!

It was also reissued on Wii through the Kirby's Dream Collection game 10 years ago, and finding one of its original Game Boy cartridges is always an option too if you have the hardware to play it! No matter how you choose to make the trip back in time, though, it will be worthwhile – Kirby's 3D adventures in the colorful Forgotten Land will be all the more mind-blowing after revisiting his totally black-and-white 2D roots! **— LUCAS**





PATREON.COM
/NINTENDOFORCE

/NINTENDOFORCE

WWW.
NFMAGAZINE.COM

YouTube
/NFMAGAZINE

@NINTENDOFORCE